

Fifth Annual H. Gene Murtha Senryu Contest

First Place

the lingering notes
of an out of tune piano
burying grandpa

Louise Hopewell

I am immediately struck by the haunting image of dissonant music floating from the family piano on the day of grandfather's funeral. Those lingering notes carry an entire life story with grace and subtlety. The out-of-tune piano not only implies an antique heirloom inherited, but also hints that not everything was always in harmony with grandpa. Is someone playing the piano, or is the speaker hearing a memory? The disembodied notes leave these questions beautifully unresolved. Finally, the poet's choice to reveal the burial in the last line, rather than the opening, crafts this senryu into a seamless, ever-expanding moment.

Brent Goodman

I am from an old german catholic family where funerals were huge and well planned and executed affairs. But that said, the funeral home always had a piano and an organ somewhere. Sometimes you hired someone to play during the viewing and services, but all too often aunt so and so would insist on playing to 'honor' the dearly departed. So this memory is impressed in my consciousness. But after reading this poem, with the wry mention of an 'out of tune piano' it just made me smile. Our lives are full of out of tune moments, all of us have them, and so to be at grandpa's funeral and hear the low conversation mingled with the out of tune notes on the piano made me think of my own grandfathers passing. I hope you find a memory of a loved one's passing that in retrospect reminds you of the human being they were and even when they tried their hardest an

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occasional note was out of tune. How fitting that in the end we can be reminded that perfection belongs to the angels and not to those of us on this small blue marbled ball. It should be noted that this poem was the first choice of *both* the judges.

Michael Rehling

Second Place

lockdown loving
the surprise of wild
nose hairs

Roberta Beary

People have often complained that there was 'nothing' to do during the pandemic lockdowns. Well, Roberta Beary offers a potent reminder that there is plenty to do and much to observe and learn during these months of 'stay at home' orders. Now as to these 'nose hairs' the question that remains is whose are they? Well, the reader can make their own choice and that is just how a great senryu should function. So many things we learn about ourselves and others when we are forced into close proximity. But somehow I believe this observation was a fleeting one, and that more enticing matters took control away from this momentary observation of the mundane.

Michael Rehling

The words "lockdown loving" may be my favorite pandemic kigo yet!

Brent Goodman

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Third Place

chemotherapy
she takes a selfie with
the new wig

Minal Sarosh

With the invention of the mobile phone and the built-in lens that can look at the world or inwardly on ourselves we have become entranced. Every flaw is revealed or it can be manipulated into obscurity with a few clicks. Sometimes it is easy to forget who we really are, what we really look like. For a cancer patient who is undergoing often arduous chemo treatments that loss of identity can multiply itself tenfold. A wig seems superficial to those of us who are healthy but to a cancer patient, it affords them the ability to get back at least one piece of their appearance they may have lost. Taking a selfie and telling the world that 'you' are still here, still smiling and reminding everyone in your life that there is a way through to 'normal' again now that is empowering and that comes through loud and clear in this poem.

Michael Rehling

It's a huge milestone for a cancer survivor to regain enough self-confidence to feel photogenic again after struggling through the ravaging side effects of chemotherapy. Total hair loss from chemo can entirely transform someone's appearance, while cancer forces us to question the very core of our own mortality. This senryu captures that moment of self love and acceptance when a survivor finally feels ready to share their new beauty

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with the world again. Choosing a wig or head covering is an act of reclaiming one's sense of identity through the most challenging battle anyone could face. So the simple step of snapping a selfie takes on monumental significance in this piece, and the poet skillfully chooses to enjamb the second line "she takes a selfie with" (instead of "wearing"), so the reader momentarily wonders, "with who?" This makes the wig take on the role of a new ally in the survivor's journey, further adding to the poem's renewed sense of hope.

Brent Goodman

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Highly Commended

silencing my cell
I enter
the old slave graveyard

Meik Blöttenberger

weighing the odds
of reincarnation
grandad rewrites his will

Nika

serendipity
running across
my favourite word

Gregory Piko

ice cream
cold curve
of a spoon

Dan Burt

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dinner time
the plate's willow pattern
reappearing

Mike Gallagher

designer wear
 she walks
her curves
 on stilettos

Kala Ramesh

birthday party
the boy
without a gift

Pat Davis

first date
the cocktail names
make her blush

Terri L. French

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everything in bloom
she picks
a training bra

Ronald K. Craig

glaciers melt
my child learns
to tread water

Ronald K. Craig

elevator—
she offers me
a mint

Greg Schwartz

moving through a cloud :: the diameter of sadness

Shloka Shankar

Alzheimer's
teaching the dog
old tricks

Tomislav Sjekloća

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vintage photo
her name given only as
"wife"

Jacque Pearce

Chinook
this morning's snowman
zombified

Benedict Grant

e
e e
s r ndipity a br z of ch rry p tals
e
e e

Michael Dudley

two-step verification
mom asks me
to ask dad

Hemapriya Chellappan

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rewriting haiku ...
a kitten twists to catch
its tail

Ken Sawitri

his deep sleep
the milk of my breast
frozen

Carmela Marino

midwinter —
the blood spot in an egg
makes her cry

timothy russell

video chat
a contrail connects
two clouds

Joanne van Helvoort

gender fluid
unsure of where
not to look

Alan S. Bridges

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not feeling well
she puts on lipstick
thicker

Owen Bullock

never
trusting again
old shelter cat

Christina Sng

another x ray . . .
a broken branch held
with moonlight

Praniti Gulyani

bliss at last
clear unpolluted skies
and silence

Barbara A. Taylor

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from hand to hand
the new baby goes
baptism morning

Stephanie Cupido

parting words . . .
silverfish
in her bible

Genevieve Wynand

condolence cards
sprinkling seed
in the bare spots

Laurie D. Morrissey

double shift
the nurse's gloves
wearing thin

Tom Bierovic

precise lines
raked in white pebbles
his mindset

Marilyn Humbert

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calloused hands
the carpenter smooths
his daughter's gown

Robert Witmer

wilderness
one more stop
to speak a flower's name

Philip Whitley

separate beds
I hear her breathing
through the wall

Janice Munro

southern heat
the buzzing
of barflies

Lori A Minor

camping alone
a deer tick on my back
just out of reach

an'ya