

# H. Gene Murtha Memorial Senryu Contest

## Final Results

**moving day  
we take apart the bed  
our parents dreamed on**

***Gregory Longenecker***

As I read through the nearly five hundred poems that Michael Rehling and I received for the 2017 H. Gene Murtha Memorial Senryu Contest, I was struck by this one in particular. With so many wonderful poems to choose from, I expected that my choice for first place would be difficult. That turned out not to be the case. The moment I read this one, I suspected that it would end up being the winner.

Since I was judging this contest blind – not knowing who had written any of the poems submitted – I was curious as to who had written it. When Michael revealed that it was by Gregory Longenecker, I wasn't surprised. His poems frequently appear in the pages of Prune Juice and I've admired his work a great deal for many years.

I love this poem for a variety of reasons. It begins with "moving day" as line one, leading me to suspect that the poem would be a humorous take on a task which no one enjoys. "we take apart the bed," line two, takes a turn toward a more sensual subject; perhaps even bawdy. But the last line, "our parents dreamed on," brings the poem to an emotional level I didn't expect – a level of pensive, gentle reverence and love which took me by surprise.

Those of us who are old enough to have lived the experience of emptying the house of our last surviving parent know that it is a bittersweet day. Each item we touch brings a rush of memories. In Gregory's poem, this fact is augmented by the fact that he's sharing this experience with a sibling – "our parents dreamed on," not my parents dreamed on. The memories are being experienced twofold and the task becomes twice as meaningful.

Going deeper into the poem, the bed takes on even more emotional depth. It isn't only about two siblings sharing an introspective moment. They aren't just remembering their parents and reluctantly disassembling their bed. The bed is also about the parents' dreams. There are four people in the room now; the two siblings and the parents who slept and dreamed on the bed – dreams that certainly included the siblings. Now the poem becomes heartbreaking in its emotional depth.

This is a beautiful poem which deserves to be preserved for future generations – generations of people who will, sadly, someday experience the heartbreaking task of helping a sibling take apart the beds their parents dreamed on.

**job interview –  
dodging puddles  
in my best shoes**

***Marilyn Humbert***

In this senryu you have an image most, if not all of us, can relate to. You are literally trying to 'put your best foot forward' in a job interview but the weather is fighting all your best efforts. Marilyn does not tell us if she succeeded in keeping those shoes shiny, but then each of us can fill in the 'end game' with our personal experience in dodging puddles. It is that simple and relatable a moment, shared in twelve syllables that made this one resonant.

**family dinner  
adding salt  
to my own wounds**

***Lori A Minor***

Ah, the 'family dinner'. We have had thousands of them in our lifetime, but making it through, one dinner at a time, provides no convenient map for our own behaviour. Even a deep Google search can only give you vague hints as to how to navigate the sometimes outright treachery of family and friends at the dinner table. Lori has committed the perfectly normal sin of adding to the fuel of her own fire. I know this situation myself, and any reader can easily relate to her self-administered pain. The one thing that makes this senryu work so well is that we all 'live through' these moments, and the proof of this is Lori's own poem. Bravo!

## **A brief word on 'short list poems'!**

When you make the top ten percent of a contest such as this one, you have written something very special. What it means is that both judges, in this case Steve Hodge and Mike Rehling, think your work has risen to the top. This contest is judged 'blind', so we are always surprised at some names, and others we just nod our heads in appreciation for the umptenth time, having seen their work many times before as editors.

We thought that limiting the selections in this category would be a disservice to senryu poets everywhere. Several of these poets have TWO poems on the short list. I would call that a WIN in my book!

Please take the time to read the work here, and to congratulate, with the same vigor you would to the preceding three winning poems, the poets represented below.

Thanks to EVERYONE who submitted. You made the judging very hard.

*Steve Hodge and Mike Rehling*

peace rally -  
my kids fight  
over a balloon

Rob Scott

All Saints' Day --  
a small superman costume  
on the barrio balcony

Maeve O'Sullivan

windowshopper -  
the glassy gaze  
of the dummy

Helga Härle

discovery  
the shadow  
on the x-ray

Kim Mannix

silence ~  
our minds still  
talking

Rajandeep Garg

winter graves  
missing people  
I never met

Rajandeep Garg

flip flops  
Grandma's laugh  
turns into a cough

Mark Gilbert

in the cathedral  
a lost soul asks me the way  
to the gift shop

Mark Gilbert

in with my taxes  
a spring poem  
written by hand

Peter Newton

a note in the Wall  
then, surrounded by friends  
he gropes for a cliché

Marietta Jane McGregor

dementia  
I lose the lily  
petal by petal

Lori A Minor

mirror mist  
I almost believe  
that I'm real

*Hansha Teki*

seven billion  
of us interpreting  
silence

*Hansha Teki*

cash-for-gold...  
the day I paid the rent  
with memories

Maria Laura Valente

WiFi zone  
I get disconnected  
from myself

Debbi Antebi

putting the comma  
in prison sentence –  
visiting hours

Debbi Antebi

winter's night  
in the finished scarf  
a dropped stitch

Mark Miller

my father's Will  
not as strong  
as I thought he was

Stevie Strang

day of remembrance  
I stop to watch  
a butterfly

Barbara Kaufmann

tying my shoes  
lately the ground  
seems so low

Bob Lucky

drawings to grandma  
my daughter stamps it  
with a cloud

Ola Lindberg

board meeting  
my doodles are  
getting better

Kanchan Chatterjee

Ouija board  
the window curtain's  
soft flutter

Kanchan Chatterjee

dense fog  
a dog's barking  
quickens my steps

Nina Kovačić

recurring dream...  
the lesson  
I have yet to learn

Pat Davis



folding her clothes  
remembering folding  
her first clothes

Hannah Mahoney

senior center  
I search for the man  
he used to be

Gregory Longenecker

summer's end ...  
a new coolness  
between the sheets

Lolly Williams

organ harvesting...  
my mother's unaccustomed  
generosity

Michele L. Harvey

winter chill  
one year later I try  
mother's lip gloss

Kath Abela Wilson

departed son  
the chess board left  
as it was

Steven Clarkson

filling your absence  
the pharmacist  
recounts my pills

Carol Ann Palomba

"What's this called, Grandma?"  
"Ampersand", is my reply  
& then more questions

Lorraine Ward

Mother's Day  
counting my blessings  
**One.** ~~by one~~

Mercy Ikuri

train whistle until I am no longer here

Alan S. Bridges

they hate his drinking --  
but they put his ashes in  
a wine bottle urn

Maria Corado

snowmelt --  
the things I thought  
I'd left behind

Julie Bloss Kelsey

wedding anniversary  
the librarian gifts me  
a book on marriage

Emmanuel Jessie Kalusian

fishing lures  
dangle from her ears  
singles bar

Dottie Piet

first touch  
holding that space  
between breaths

Urszula Funnell

orioles  
oblivious  
to my success

Brad Bennett

recurring weed  
a sign we need  
to dig deeper

dl mattila

our daughter's wedding  
i stop to pick wild roses  
for my ex-wife

Tyson West

refugee camp  
children  
waiting for a childhood

Patricia Pella

new waitress  
her smile seems big enough  
for something more

Gregory Piko

the sign  
five mile point  
eight miles

Kristyn Blessing

graveside  
my toddler's pink balloon  
keeps bobbing

Cynthia Rowe

old sitcoms  
I cringe at the laughter  
of dead people

Gabriel Bates

photographer's funeral  
no pictures  
of her

Julie Warther

stored in her phone photos of the unborn child

Sandra Simpson

performance review  
the hiss of a cigarette  
in a puddle

Joshua Gage

chili night  
the last roll  
of toilet paper

Joshua Gage

Our first date  
To give or not to give him  
An apple

Anna Goluba

bed time . . .  
she asks if her rag doll  
can stay up late

Kala Ramesh

train journey  
each one of us  
a hula doll

Aparna Pathak

stage four  
the doctor's eye contact  
wavers

Peter Jastermsky

climate change  
her tone begins to sound  
monotonous

Angelo B. Ancheta

phone interview  
she applies her foundation  
with extra care

Amy Losak

Mother's Day  
I tiptoe around  
the past tense

Tiffany Shaw-Diaz

board meeting  
my doodles are  
getting better

Kanchan Chatterjee

the girl  
selfying her face  
cocks her leg anyway

Danny Blackwell