

# Sixth Annual H. Gene Murtha Memorial Contest

## First Prize

courtroom—  
how white the shirt  
of the rapist

## Arvinder Kaur

This senryu's power comes not only from Kaur's deft handling of a sensitive issue, but also from the truth it reveals. The law is often not on the side of the one violated. Instead of compassion, they are forced to prove their assault, and in doing so are often blamed that they "brought it on themselves," or equally horrid, that they are lying. Kaur highlights this with her treatment of the color white. The color white is often used to denote purity, cleanliness, even holiness, and here is used to showcase their perceived innocence before proven guilty (if they will be at all), and possibly even their own belief that they have done nothing wrong. In one word, Kaur has aptly summarized this painful reality of the injustice that those who are sexually harmed endure. It is also not lost on us that this senryu remains gender neutral. Whether intended or not, it leaves this scene open to interpretation for it doesn't matter your gender, no means no, and rape is rape.

## Second Prize

first cry . . .  
I too am born  
a mother

## Agnes Eva Savich

No matter your definition of when life begins, the moment a baby is born is transformative for the one giving birth. Here, not only has Savich brought a new life into the world (we assume, although there is the possibility that this was an adoption scenario), but her own life, her identity, has been reborn into that of a mother. The choice of "first cry" evokes not only the cries of her child, but her own. The sorrow, the joy, the pain, and the triumph of birth is embodied in that first line. Then, as this senryu unfolds so does the understanding that she too will have to take her first breath as a mother, her first awkward steps in learning to care for a child, her own journey that she will traverse for the rest of her life. In eight simple words, Savich draws us in and conveys the deep mystery and complexity of motherhood.

### **Third Prize**

white privilege—  
a protester asks  
to use the bathroom

### **Kelley White**

Writing from our cultural perspective, as we realize other countries and cultures have the same struggles, the hidden scars and open wounds of racism are still among us. We do not know what kind of protest this is, but if one can put this in the context of Black Lives Matter the sense of comfort and ease that exists for this protester would be in stark contrast to their fellow protestors, white privilege indeed. Here the request is simple, but not for a water bottle, not for a helping hand, for use of the facilities. This harkens back to the not distant enough past where racial segregation was law in the American south and only someone who was white would even be allowed to make such a request. Taking our past and placing it in our present, is a stroke of brilliance, and in this senryu it is boldly brought to the surface. There is no stepping around the issue, no watering it down, from line one we know what lies at the heart of this senryu, and in that heart we are brought to task to face the harsh reality we live in.

## **Highly Commended**

becoming extinct my spirit animal

### **Hemapriya Chellappan**

seesaw  
my daughter rises  
into her laughter

### **RonScully**

no longer welcome  
at my daughter's home  
I miss her peonies

### **Christine Lamb Stern**

his favorite belt  
the last two holes  
hammered in

### **Pat Davis**

alone  
with all my technology  
Alone

**Pat Davis**

half full  
or half empty ...  
family plot

**Robert B McNeill**

promotion  
the windowsill plants  
too bent to straighten

**Alexander B. Joy**

rain over the sea  
my generation starts  
to pass away

**Nikolay Grankin**

last chemo  
a lotus above  
the waterline

**Cynthia Rowe**

festooned bridge:  
    among the lovers' locks  
    3 linked together

**Michael Dudley**

hospice bed  
forming  
her chrysalis

**David Kāwika Eyre**

false spring  
I rub red marker  
from her lips

**Nick Hoffman**

a single slice  
in the toaster  
this loneliness

**Jennifer Hambrick**

falling light  
rinses over his face...  
father at the sink

**Jo Balistreri**

vaccineneedleamightylongemdash

**P. H. Fischer**

family mantel the ashes I'll inherit

**Agnes Eva Savich**

his hand-painted postcard  
more cherry blossoms  
than words

**Alvin B. Cruz**

bleeding through  
a fresh coat of paint  
old regrets

**Mark A. Forrester**

vacuuming fruit flies my karmic overload

**Madhuri Pillai**

she loves me  
she loves me not  
shucking oysters

**Gregory Piko**

long snowfall  
the weight  
of a confession

**Janice Munro**

shaking her  
upside down  
piggy bank Earth

**Lisa Anne Johnson**

infant's funeral  
two pallbearers  
more than enough

**Bart Greene**

death vigil . . .  
the soothing sound  
of a singing bell

**Kevin Valentine**

temple bells  
we wake to the same  
unholy land

**K Srilata**

cranes still dance  
in the closet  
her kimono

**Philip Whitley**

gradually  
i resemble the corpse  
i will be

**Vijay Prasad**

in the packed church an empty man

**Stephen Toft**

three-legged dog  
how easily  
i win custody

**Maria Bonsanti**

daffodil shoots  
the children  
I never had

**Pris Campbell**

wedding morning  
last nights rain  
shaken from the trees

**Laurie D. Morrissey**

widower  
the unevenness  
of his sideburns

**Caroline Giles Banks**

peeling tree bark  
she hides her spotted hands  
in the interview

**Amy Losak**

laundromat  
an old woman folds  
into herself

**Terri L. French**

mass shooting  
the frayed ends  
of a flag

**Alan S. Bridges**

mastectomy  
she hands me a bag  
of barely worn bras

**Terri L. French**

ten children later  
a box of condoms  
in the hope chest

**Peter Jastermsky**

marriage proposal—  
she analyses  
my syntax

**Dan Iulian**

after you left  
knowing and not knowing  
the names of birds

**Helen Ogden**

physics department  
the pristine state  
of the ladies' room

**Antoinette Cheung**

flea market  
between bullet shells  
this and that god

**Sanela Pliško**

***Respectfully Submitted***

**Tia Haynes** - Editor of Prune Juice Journal

**Bryan Rickert** - Editor of Failed Haiku