

## **2024 Gene Murtha contest results:**

Judges: Marilyn Ashbaugh and John Pappas

### **1st Place**

petro c. k.

all  
of  
us

icar  
us

fall  
Ing

how  
ler  
mon  
keys

About a month ago at this writing, the Associated Press ran an article about a deadly heat wave in Mexico that, in addition to precipitating several human fatalities, caused nearly 150 howler monkeys, an endangered species since 2003, to drop dead from their trees. The vertical arrangement of this incisive senryu, the use of an inclusive first-person plural pronoun, non-standard capitalization and medial enjambment, and the deft allusion to Icarus impactfully drive home that we must pay heed to these simian “canaries in coal mines” and other metrics that show us the ultimate price of our hubris and entitlement. This stunning senryu stretches the limits of the genre and urges the reader to work for change before it is too late

## 2nd Place

Tom Bierovic

bullied girl  
in her shirt pocket  
an origami swan

Pathos is evoked by the first line “bullied girl” in this senryu. According to the Pew Research Center, nearly half of US teens have been cyberbullied. Teenage girls are especially likely to have experienced bullying online.

L2: in her shirt pocket

Tension is raised by L2, “ in her shirt pocket”. What is it she carries so close to her heart; something important to her in a location of ready access? Perhaps something that makes her feel safe and protected; perhaps a weapon?

L3: an origami swan

L3 releases the tension with “ an origami swan”. The tension is quickly replaced by mystery (yugen). The reader is called upon to connect the associations. This reader recalled “The Ugly Duckling”, a Danish fairytale of a male fledgling mistaken for a duck. Everywhere he goes, he is tormented until he joins a flock of swans that welcomes and accepts him. In Japanese symbolism, the swan is associated with transformation, prophecy, and enchantment. Vertical depth is created by these many associations.

### 3rd place Tie

Kala Ramesh

a termite-eaten photo frame  
still  
holds  
her smile

The wabi-sabi of a termite-eaten photo frame evokes for the poet a beautiful memory of “her smile”. Natsukashii is the Japanese term used when something evokes a fond memory from the past. The term is derived from the verb “netsuku” which indicates joy and gratitude for the past rather than a desire to return to it. Whether the smile is captured in photo or painting or captured within the poet’s memory, we readers will never know until we complete the space, the ma, provided in this concrete senryu with a story of our own.

### 3rd Place Tie

Laurie Wilcox-Meyer

while (bumper-to-bumper) the willow sways

To call the disjunction between the heat, noise, and fury of a summer traffic jam and the placid movements of willow branches a contrast would be to do this monoku an incredible disservice. By completely ensconcing the fragment first in parentheses and then within the larger phrase and image of a gentle breeze through the leaves of the willow, this poet illustrates the insignificance of human desire and the transitory nature of human life. Only obliquely referencing human activity (and in a metonymically reductive way, representing with a simple idiom all of the thwarted desire and claustrophobic frustration of these individuals hard-pressed to reach their destinations) this senryu genially puts us in our place.

## **Honorable Mentions (unranked):**

Erin Castaldi:

double sugar bacon  
the gentle way she  
says goodbye

Lev Hart:

the floral print dress faded & worn farmer's wife

Debbie Strange:

solar eclipse  
the times we choose  
to look away

Farah Ali:

spinning compass  
navigating  
a neurotypical world

Ravi Kiran:

second marriage  
the pause before  
I do

Neena Singh:

silent walk  
her dog collar  
in my pocket

Minh-Triết Pham:

cold moon —  
her wish for a child  
after the abortion

Christina Sng:

quiet river  
a pebble watches  
the world go by

Ann Sullivan:

twenty-six weeks. . .  
her sisters-in-law  
take down the crib

Elisa Theriana:

man in the moon  
the shadow my father keeps  
even in death

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt:

scorched skin  
that summer  
of no consent

Barrie Levine:

stirred, not shaken  
my son survives  
the war protest

Marianne Paul:

prison buzz cut  
on his scalp  
a childhood scar

Rowan Beckett Minor:

day moon—  
my mixed grandma  
passes for white