

failed ~~haiku~~

A Journal of English Senryu
Volume 10, Issue 110

kelly moyer 'Failed' Editor

www.failedhaiku.com

[@SenryuJournal](#) on Twitter

[Facebook Page](#)

[YouTube](#)

haibun

Cast List

In order of appearance
(all work copyrighted by the authors)

Robert Witmer
Michael Rehling
Alfred Booth
Mary Catherine Harper
Gayle Worthy
Coral Carter
E. L. Blizzard
Caroline Giles Banks
Fanny Budan
Bryan D. Cook
Paul Callus
Kimberly Kuchar
Arvinder Kaur
Nalini Shetty
Joanna Delalande/Oscar Luparia
Doug Sylver
Jeral Williams
Antonio Mangiameli
Robert Erlandson
Jenny Shepherd
Fionnuala Waldron
Ganesh
John S Green
Isabella Mori

Some Things Never Change

I get in line with the seabirds. They seem to be looking at their reflections in the thin film of water behind the retreating wave. So I look down. There I am. In a baggy bathing suit with a snorkel in my left hand. It's hot, and the water smells like gasoline. A kid runs by and the birds scatter. There I am. In a baggy bathing suit—all alone.

a bald tire
on a patch of ice
the world turns

Robert Witmer

Lost Thoughts

Memory is fluid and fickle, but words on paper, a screen, or recorded on a smartphone have a strange ‘substance’, and we writers know this instinctively. But I am stumbling, it is so hard to explain this moment, and my perception of it, to anyone else, but I keep trying, and in less than seventeen syllables. Am I shooting for a miracle? The longer I try, the more doubt clings to each word. I am so frustrated, and now I just want to put this one behind me. But I just can’t stop thinking about it!

warm rain
mosquitoes follow me
into the men’s room

Michael Rehling

Astronomical Death

My Japanese friends taught me the value of visiting the graves of those who have passed on before . . . In America it is a lost custom, but in Japan the dead are honored often, but particularly as the air turns in the fall season . . . The way it is done in their culture is far from sad, and not at all cold . . . The graveside is attended to, and the dead quietly remembered . . . It is a peaceful time . . . I left the house late, and when I was through with the cutting of a few weeds, and planting a handful of bulbs for the spring, it was evening . . .

stargazing
at a friend's grave
cancer rising

Michael Rehling

Legacy

There's been another rainy cold snap. Today I heard the old homeless man coughing in his zipped-up tent. It sounded worrisome. We talk twice a month, sometimes more, as our paths cross. Short bursts of dramatic scenes from life we've lived or heard about. Speaking of his fears for America, he once told me he has never dared to hold another man in his arms. He was a working man who paid his taxes. His sister won't take him in. About his life on the streets, that's all he's shared. "And the French social services?" Volumes of paperwork already filed. All they can do is turn an official blind eye as he camps next to an exhaust vent of the frozen food store. It's been two years.

the Milky Way
shines on regrets and hope
one more old man

Alfred Booth

As Old as the Hills

Green things freeze near the desert creep, where winter dusts the bone-dry hills, dry down to the deepest shale. But nothing ever freezes in the place you have named Carrot Hill, for its spread of orange flowers, four petals each, their gold-dusted centers beckoning bees.

The carpet of unnamed flowers is so thick beneath your feet, the blooms and fuzzled leaves never flatten, no matter how many times you and your siblings truck up and roll back down the hill. Your hands turn orange from bouquets gathered for the hideout you cobble together from twisted windmill blades wedged between a dying cottonwood and a rusted thresher. To you those steel blades still look like siblings to the nearby tallgrass. And always will.

It is the unspoken, deep-in-the-bone intention of every child to live forever. And this is the place to do it. Here in your memory of hands stained the color of no-name flowers, on a hill pledged to the desert, above a farm where rust and weed drink every drop of water squeezed from the sky.

old farm folk know
every vein of their river
blood stored in cacti

Mary Catherine Harper

marycatherineharper.org

Guardian

She walks out the day after the hurricane to see how her property fared. Gazing down the slope beside her house, she hears the trickle of the tiny creek below and the hum of a neighbor's generator, then a slight snap followed by the mighty roar of a torrent of roiling water stampeding the rhododendrons and poplars. She jumps back and watches in disbelief as the land transforms into a river of mud and debris, filling the fish pond and raging around the sides of the garage. She has no way of telling anyone—no cell signal, no power, no internet. Alone, she fears for the two large koi she had fed the night before the storm.

last rose of summer
poised
on erosion's edge

Gayle Worthy

Bringing in the Sheaves

I wander inside when I hear music coming from our house. I am stunned to see my grandmother at the piano. Before this, I've only seen her cleaning, cooking, mending, and toiling in her garden. Sometimes, she rests. But even then, she is not still, shifting in her chair and worrying the collar of her dress with rough, arthritic hands.

burlesque party
we suspend disbelief

Her life has not been easy. She left school after third grade to help her mother raise four little boys and her father tend to the cotton crop. She married young and had six children of her own. One died in childhood, one in the war.

mother's day
flowers wilt
beside his picture

I silently watch her careworn hands move gracefully, playing one of the hymns from church. Her lined face smoothes. So does my silky one.

harvest time
singing our salvation

Gayle Worthy

The Bloke Next Door

Same time at the end of the day in all weather I hear the closing flap of the bloke next door's post box as it flips shut TINK! Work finished. Home. Mail collected. TINK! Each evening I waited for the TINK! I hardly spoke to the bloke next door. Barely knew him. He had a chatty relationship with my other half. They had swapped names. Discussed the tree roots pushing against a wall. Exchanged ideas to solve problems with the retic. I overheard the news he had refurbished the kitchen using second-hand benches and cupboards from a house a mate had demolished. On the day we saw he had changed his red car for a white van with solar panels he came to the fence and spoke. He was leaving. I was delighted and asked was it a trip north? His response was curt and directed to my other half. He was going down south to take photos of the stars, a hobby he had neglected. We would not see him again. She had kicked him out. Now she had the new kitchen she had kicked him out. The new boyfriend was ready to move in. His voice strained. There were tears. The best we could do was to wish him well. A week later an evening storm was coming in. The wind picked up and the post box began to TINK! TINK! TINK!

distant rain
over there
not over here

Coral Carter

One Life

Balls clack and roll across the worn, warped pool table in the complex's clubhouse. The sound of the pool balls knocking together is soothing like a brain massage. And when they drop into pockets, that sound slips a tingle down my spine.

Tonight, a neighbor shoots with me. Neither of us are especially good but we bolster each other with an occasional "Nice shot!" and high-five. By the second game, my neighbor opens up about his experiences as an immigrant; one life in focus. My ears trip over his melodic accent but they're open and he's patient.

one less layer
the flowering night
warms his skin

E. L. Blizzard

If the Shoe Fits . . .

Boston. Late 1940s. I bike to the general store for penny candy. WWII sugar rations are over. My nickel-a-week allowance is back!

The shopkeeper says there is a new machine that takes pictures of feet to custom fit shoes. Do I want to try it? Curious, I slide one foot, then the other, into the Paul Bunyan-size box. With a click and a clack, my shoe, sock, flesh vanish to reveal 26 white bones. Enticed down this rabbit hole of wonders, I reduce then resurrect myself, again and again.

It is years before I relate my girlhood game with the corner store's X-ray machine to diseases of radiation exposure.

Good and Plenty candy
no thing is
what it seems

Caroline Giles Banks

Newsworthy

An unidentified gentleman with a service dog entered the tiny library and walked directly into the restroom. An hour later, there was no response after needy patrons shouted or knocked at the door. They complained to a concerned librarian who in turn called 911. A crowd of spectators gathered to watch as firemen partially destroyed the door with axes. Upon entering the windowless room, there was no sign of the man nor his canine companion.

empty bluebird box . . .
only the bushy tail
of a red squirrel

Fanny Budan

Exploring the Fourth Dimension

Albert Einstein once stated, tongue in cheek, that time is what a clock measures. It flows steadily forward and without it, we would not exist.

*A fisherman rides a rescued turtle to the dragon kingdom of the princess on the deep ocean floor.**

But that is not how I perceive time. The days and hours hurtle towards Xmas. Even a week's vacation in the sun seems too short. Yet the day drifts slowly when the fish don't bite. Waiting to be seen in a hospital clinic makes "emergency" an oxymoron.

He soon becomes homesick and departs with her gift of a magic box, promising not to open it.

And now time seems to be collapsing as I near my four score years. Have we really been married for over a half century? Surely the broken dishwasher is still under warranty and not 25 years old! The kids aren't over fifty, or are they? That computer is not obsolete, I bought it only yesterday!

Back home, everything has changed, he recognizes nothing. Lifting the lid, a cloud of white smoke turns him into an old man.

I'm aging faster than my ego allows. No longer a spring chicken. I had better get a move on to finish my life's bucket list before my biological clock stops ticking.

*grandma's clock chimes—
warm memories
of her daily baking*

*Summarised from the Japanese folklore tale of Urashima Tarō

Bryan D. Cook

An Offering of Poppies

Californian wildfires, aided by strong winds, left a trail of destruction, deaths, and acres of ravaged land. Yet, out of the ashes, stimulated by intense heat, fire follower seeds start to sprout, and in no time at all, an explosion of orange and red poppies give a lease of new life to the barren land—a gratifying gift of hope which only nature has the ability to offer.

the essence of rain
nourishes an arid heart—
inflorescent love

Paul Callus

Distant Light

I want him to look at me the way he used to. He still calls me beautiful, but I think I can hear a difference in his voice and see a difference in his eyes. He's aged well. In fact, I would say he's even more attractive than when we were younger and first married. He's gained just a little weight and some muscle in the right places on his thin frame. It doesn't matter that he started going gray in his twenties; he looks dashing with silver locks framing his green eyes.

autumn amble
the night lights up
with his smile

Meanwhile, I look in the mirror at lines and wrinkles that didn't used to be there. I hate my sagging neck skin and my less-defined chin. Even though I was thin most of my life, I've gained some weight and have a double chin at times. There are bags under my eyes, and I joke that you can see the baggage I carry. Although I don't think I frown that often, my mouth looks sad, with the early beginnings of marionette lines. I can't help but wonder, "Do women really age differently than men?"

lunar clock
the second hand
ticks faster

Pushing away the magnification mirror, I shrug. Gray hairs shine under the LEDs. More have grown in recently, and I'm not going to dye them. I waggle my eyebrows (forehead wrinkles be damned!), and stick out my tongue, before leaving the bathroom.

dark window
an ancient star
winks

Kimberly Kuchar

The Moving Finger Writes . . .

Midterms have just finished and there are bundles of answer sheets to be evaluated. As I look at pages after pages written with ballpoint pens, my thoughts go back to the time when, as a child, I had learned how to write, trying to achieve perfection in cursive. A fountain pen was considered a prized possession those days. Father was very possessive about his Parker. It always adorned his coat pocket close to the rose bud at the lapel. When he was awarded the President's medal for meritorious service, I ran to his arms and told him, in all my innocence, that I will one day gift him a *Mont Blanc* when there is enough in my piggy bank. He smiled with his eyes and tightened our hug.

As I grew up and got busy with my life I forgot about *Mont Blanc*. I can afford it today but . . .

ink blue sky—
a wistful look
as stars drift by

Arvinder Kaur

Zari Paisleys

My growing years were spent in awe of my mother. In my eyes she was the most beautiful woman on this earth. She is deft at household chores and I often hear people telling her that she is a gracious host.

On her visit to the thrift store once she had forced Daddy to get her an antique dressing table with three mirrors. It was a stunning piece and had cherubs and roses carved out of oak wood. A tiny cupid sat pretty in the middle of its frame. Mama was very fond of it. She would watch her image intently as she draped her favourite Kanchipuram and tucked jasmine in her bun. Sitting on her bed I wondered what a marvel she was! People often said that I was her mirror image but I have always had serious doubts.

satin ribbons
in my daughter's pigtails . . .
robin's wingspan

Arvinder Kaur

One-Way

The book slips from my hands, landing face-down on the armrest. A thin curl of paper peeks out—an old ticket, yellowed and soft at the edges. I trace the date. I no longer remember the journey, only that I never went back.

forgotten station
a crow preens
on the rusted rail

Window Seat

The bus jerks forward. We sway with it, passengers in quiet choreography. She adjusts the strap of her bag and stares out the fogged window. Fingerprints from earlier rides catch the glow of passing streetlights—small, greasy constellations of other lives. Someone mutters. No one answers.

early stop
the conductor's whistle
lost in exhaust fumes

Nalini Shetty

An Ordinary Miracle

Today, time seems to stop in this garden, deserted and noiseless after the spring rain. The flowers, the trees, the lawn: everything is quiet and beautiful . . .

Being here to live these moments . . . Closing my eyes to listen to the silence; touching the rose petals with these pearls of water folded like a delicate kiss upon awakening; enjoying the unexpected sunbeams . . .

I am not alone
the shiny strip
of a snail

This is life: an ordinary miracle, with the earth that now smells so good after the downpour. And this is the moment of dreams, which arise from this deep calm . . .

Prose: Joanna Delalande

Senryu: Oscar Luparia

Generation Gaps

At the beach, it's the middle of April and still very cold. Tough children running barefoot in bathing suits. Their parents and maybe grandparents dressed in jackets, long pants, baseball hats, some with scarves and gloves. Their eyes alternate between their children and their cell phones. A smiling black dog, let off its leash, runs with the complete joy of freedom.

I sit on a huge log, washed up long ago, observing. Should have worn my sunglasses, facing west as the day, along with the tide, ebbs. Realizing I am one serious injury away from old age, I get up slowly, watching my step as I go.

spring in her step—
running into the wind
a young girl takes flight

Doug Sylver

As the Moon Shrinks, So Do I

Look at the sky; remind yourself of the cosmos. Seek vastness at every opportunity in order to see the smallness of yourself. ~Matt Haig

West from a mountain ridge, without the mist of city lights, the red glow slowly morphs to quickening yellow, then fades into black. A shower of light emerges through the veil of distance and disperses twinkling stars beyond counting. I watch Venus slowly creep across millimeters at 78,000 miles per hour. I spin without nausea or awareness. I orbit the sun without sensing movement. Distance deconstructs from east and west to up, out and surrounding. My hand feels near, all else is far. Earth time melts to the fluidity of space. A pika chirp parts silence, a companion to the night. I shrink before the vastness and cautiously glance inward. I listen for whispers, seek an unmasked self and know the touch of living.

facing the moon
my silhouette
has no shadow

Jeral Williams

Memories

In the basement of my apartment building lives the lady who worked for many years in the porter's lodge. I am very fond of her, she has known me since I was a child. In the evening, when I come back home, I often go to say hello to her. I know her habits. I know that at the time of my coming back home, she is cooking dinner, which is always the same, very frugal.

a hot broth
a spoonful of rice
an empty chair

Antonio Mangiameli

Homemade Bread

It was a hot April day. A crew of three men came to cut away branches from five Norwegian pines that threatened power lines. When they were finishing, my wife and I served the crew cold drinks and some of her pumpkin bread. As we talked, the crew boss mentioned that his grandmother had come from Norway. I added that my folks were from Sweden. Another crew member said his great grandparents had come from Italy. We shared stories about their experiences as immigrants. The third crew member, a young black man, mentioned how good the pumpkin bread was and asked if it was home made.

so different
stories told and untold
yet . . . here we are

Robert Erlandson

Waiting for Good News

On my way to a meeting, I step out of Holborn tube station, and as I walk east, I look up, and see a 7-storey building, with a roof garden. There is a 9-storey building next to it, with a 6-pot-chimney stack, forming most of the garden's side wall. On the wide expanse of brick, someone has painted a huge Palestinian flag.

High above me, I can only see one, small tree just beyond the iron railing. As I get a bit closer, I see it is an olive tree.

dove on the wing
still searching for a branch
to bring home

Jenny Shepherd

Temptation

“You should never,” she said, flicking her veil over her shoulder, “sit on a man’s lap without a folded newspaper placed between you. Nor should you consider going to a ballroom without your white gloves.”

“Indeed,” she said, as she lit the Bunsen burner to begin that day’s experiment, “young men are very immature, so it is up to you to show them how to behave with a lady.”

Chemistry class with Sr Agnes was always a quixotic mixture of scientific principles and morality tales, balancing the competing truths of science and religion, and the liberating possibilities of knowledge with the need for good girls to always get their man.

glitterballs
pattern the empty dance floor
who will move first?

The ballrooms of her imagination were very different to the heaving, sweaty discos of late ‘60s Ireland. Standing in the middle of a bevy of mini-skirts, with nothing to distinguish you except your Mary Quant eyeliner, you tried not to make eye-contact with the bell-bottomed, long-haired and pimply youths who still held the power of choice.

in the closet
a pair of red stilettos
late night kiss

Fionnuala Waldron

Avian Art

Ah, Mumbai—a symphony of honking, haggling, and heat, where organized chaos feels like a generous euphemism. There I am, feeling like a gladiator, ready to conquer an interview. My bike, parked at a crooked angle, seems to wink at my misplaced optimism.

And then, fate. A rogue pigeon, unburdened by earthly concerns, christens my brand-new shirt with all the finality of a rubber stamp. In a city of twenty million targets, I am the chosen canvas.

I walk in anyway, clinging to the sliver of hope that they'll notice not the stain, but the man beneath it.

empty train seat
a curve pulls us sideways
into the unknown

Ganesh

Gibbous Earth

At Avenue Bread, we chat in poetic streams of consciousness—then we write postcards—peace postcards. The laughter of a young girl, sitting nearby sipping hot chocolate, fades into my deep coffee. In the West Bank, the sun is setting. Soon, occupation forces—young men and women, trained not to think, will bulldoze homes, destroy families, not knowing, yet, they are losing themselves. I look up—the young girl is gone.

super low tide—
crows crack clams
on the craggy shore

As chaos swirls throughout social media, I watch gulls float effortlessly in the wind outside my window. I've been taking my coffee stronger lately, and drinking more bourbon. We poets will be okay—won't we? Community means more now than ever. Our peace poems ripple out across the world. They matter. Such fun the gulls are having—diving, soaring. They make me smile—give me hope. They don't mind nature's anarchy.

a child in rain boots
squats at the tide pool—
purple sea stars

The din of this café washes over me, and I enter quietude. Maybe it's the caffeine, maybe it's the view of Bellingham Bay. There's so much to be thankful for—even with the rage and despair of our politics—our war-filled world. Let's take a bath from it all. Go to the wonder of woods—soak in the majestic wisdom of trees.

mycelia—
the thermal glide
of an Andean condor

John S Green

Last Supper, Growing Hot and Growing Cold

A year ago, H's life expired. When the needle went in, she said good-bye to each one of us in turn, reminding us to love, love, love. We saw the blood drain from her face, finally serene after sixty years, from birth to death, of pain and struggle. Her body grew cold. We carried it to the hearse, strewing chrysanthemums and roses along the way.

first leaves twirling
onto the ground
our evenings grow cooler

Two days on, her flesh and bones went up in flames. Her ashes rest now, at whatever temperature the seasons serve up, in an old-fashioned soup terrine in the kitchen, just as she wanted it. (The soup terrine, you must know, is in the shape of a cow.)

compost
under the rotting potato
the stirrings of new life

And here I sit, twelve months later, in her kitchen, under the cow's watchful, smiling eyes, eating the last of H's famous cabbage rolls. We took them out of the deep freeze and heated them up. I can see her hands forming the rolls, can hear the stories of her Hungarian mother teaching her to cook. H is on fire, making funny faces with her cancer-eaten toothless mouth, swatting at her husband with a spatula, feeding morsels of the filling to the dogs, breathing life into everyone and everything she touches.

steamed up window
grandfather frost
can wait a few more minutes

She touched this cabbage roll. I place it on my lips, chew it, ingest it, wash it down with a glass of Pálinka.* A part of her becomes me.

*A Hungarian fruit brandy

Isabella Mori

Kelly Moyer 'Failed' Editor
editor@failedhaiku.com
(all work copyrighted by the authors)