

## 2014 HSA Haibun Contest

### Judge

Ferris Gilli, Marietta, GA

When considering the merits of a haibun, I keep several central elements in mind. Interesting, evocative prose, and verse that complements the prose are paramount. Whether the poem has an obvious relation with the prose or an indirect one, it should contribute to the essence of the author's experience. Length of paragraph(s) and length of haibun are not particularly important to me. Well-balanced, resonant content overall is key. While the writer may take a philosophical, even humorous approach, I hope to discover why the author's experience compelled him or her to write about it. I prefer verse that makes good sense in or out of the haibun context; but of greater importance, I expect to get more from the juxtaposition of the prose and verse than I might from either one without the other. There are certain caveats that I believe are crucial when writing a haibun. The prose should not explain the haiku, nor should the haiku explain the prose. With few exceptions, the writer should repeat as little as possible, especially avoiding repetition of main verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. Just as the prose should not be repeated in the verse, the verse should not be repeated in the prose. Judging duties aside, I enjoyed every entry. Having gained something unique from each, I'm grateful to have had this opportunity.

*Ferris Gilli*

~ **First Place (\$100)** ~

**Trick Knee**

Marcyn Del Clements, Claremont, CA

Crouched under the dying plum tree, hacking out root growth, it hits again. Fourth time in 2 weeks. I am paralyzed by pain, can't get up, can't open my leg. The doctor thinks, strained tendon. The PT thinks it might be arthritis holding up a ligament that crosses the knee, then lets it snap back in place. Sit, try to relax. Putting aside the pruners, I crawl into the shade of the apricot tree, wait.

a brown wood beetle  
crosses a patch of sun  
my watch ticking

I lick a small cut on my hand, from pruning asparagus fern. Nasty stuff. My husband hates it. A drop of sweat rolls off my head, down past my ear, drops to my sun-browned arm. Black & red ants fuss over the apricots I left around the trunk for them, and for the blue-throated fence lizard who lives in the geranium duff. A towhee, sensing the garden is quiet now, flits out of the hibiscus and down on the walk. Chucks his long tail above his flashy crissom, struts into shade of the pine where we have hung the seed feeders.

I try to gauge the passage of time, silently berate myself for not checking my watch when it hit. Seems like it takes longer each time. *What are you going to do if this happens while climbing Kilimanjaro?* my husband wants to know.

the tree leaves tremble  
my neighbor's playing  
rap again

When it eases, I'm fine, I heft the bucket of cuttings to my hips and schlep it to the wheelie bins. I've started therapy, exercises to strengthen my quads. Are you getting the message, asks my therapist, that you shouldn't squat anymore? She told me I could keep riding my bike. Just stay on it, she said (referring to why I'm in this mess, by falling off.) And I can continue cardio training, my stiff hikes.

But when I'm climbing on Kilimanjaro, what will I do when I have to pee? Get a funnel? I wonder how that would work? Could I direct the stream like the guys? Write my name on the rocks? Adding nitrogen that lichens would be attracted to. Then as weary climbers ascend the mountain, age after age, there is my name, in orange and yellow lichen, indelibly graf-fitted for all time.

under the staghorn  
the lily planted last year  
blooms Easter white

Like most good narratives, "Trick Knee" contains tension, highly descriptive imagery, and a dose of humor. The variations of sentence length and occasionally abbreviated syntax contribute to brevity and compression. Subjects and even verbs are sometimes omitted, but without obscuring meaning or creating distractions. I am already intrigued by the first two sentences when the next words, "I am paralyzed by pain," grip me and keep me reading through the last vivid haiku. In the shade of an apricot tree, I wait with the writer for her release from intense discomfort. The writer's detailed attention to small creatures in the garden engages me; her informal, somewhat intimate style of writing nearly convinces me that we are actually together in deep conversation, she relating the experience, and I listening and nodding: "I lick a small cut on my hand, . . ." Oh, yes, I've often done that myself.

Her husband raises the question of what she will do if the arthritis strikes while she's climbing a mountain. From the garden, communing with birds and ants and a lizard, suddenly to

the heights of Kilimanjaro! But the flare-up in her knee passes, and it's back to yard work for the writer. In the last paragraph, however, she considers how she could perform bodily functions on the side of a mountain if unable to squat. The way she pokes fun at herself raises my eyebrows as I chuckle and try to imagine myself in the same situation. Still, the writer's physical pain is very real, and I suspect she's quite seriously concerned with how she would handle such mundane yet problematic needs. The three pleasingly placed haiku seem perfect companions for the prose. Though each poem could be published on its own in a respected haiku journal, verse and prose work together here to create a strong, memorable haibun.

~ **Second Place** ~

**A House of One's Own**

Deb Koen, Rochester, NY

The buds are popping, as we hop off the school bus. Timmy takes my hand and leads me to his hideaway tucked into the largest oak on the hillside. This secret perch is the most thrilling discovery yet of my twelve years.

Over summer, I transform the three-plank platform into a full-fledged tree house. Hauling up boards with a pulley and banging in nails, I decorate with a Beatles poster, a flowery swag, and a wind chime. Each day from morning until my mother's dinner call echoes down the valley, I claim my new home away from home.

By the time the leaves turn, Timmy's interest has dimmed and my passion intensified. Should he return to reclaim his space, I don't know to what extent I'll go to stand my ground, but I'm quite certain I will never surrender.

time of war  
the peace symbol  
all the rage

Beginning with the first sentence, the writer vividly and skillfully carries readers through three seasons. It becomes clear that this brief haibun centers on a tree house belonging to one child (Timmy) but eventually claimed by another. The author's increasingly possessive love for the construction drives the story, which is shown through detailed description of the long hours spent there and the decorative additions to the three-plank platform. With growing interest, I observe the writer's actions that reveal emotional attachment to the property and a resolve not to surrender it to its original owner. With only the mention of war and a single icon, the haiku reflects the mood of the prose, and beyond that, the era in which the writer's experience occurred. Verse and prose satisfyingly combine to depict a significant period in the writer's childhood. After many readings, I have come to consider "A House of One's Own" as a compact, open-ended, coming-of-age story. If Timmy returns to claim the tree house, will the author surrender it? How will the decision affect the children's friendship? I believe the author is wise to leave readers with a few unanswered questions, allowing us to consider how we would have reacted in similar circumstances, or how our own children might behave.

~ **Third Place** ~

**Thirteen**

Phyllis Lee, Sebring, OH

It was Awards Assembly, the day before eighth grade graduation. I was the only one to win a scholarship for free lessons at Chicago's Art Institute. How would I get there? Mama didn't drive and Pa worked Saturdays delivering ice. I was thirteen and would have to take the streetcar from our neighborhood in Brighton Park, miles and miles, to downtown Chicago.

Pa said no. Mama wiped a tear from her eye. I couldn't go.

road's edge  
a child chalks her name  
before the rain

Simply and concisely written, “Thirteen” depicts a universally recognized dilemma. The author moves quickly from the prize to the conflict, which the key question poses: “How would I get there?” A thirteen-year-old is dealt heavy disappointment when denied free art lessons at Chicago’s Art Institute in downtown Chicago. Although the writer doesn’t actually say so, it seems to me that the child understands and accepts the father’s decision without bitterness—a decision clearly made in the interest of the teenager’s safety. Yet the depth of the disappointment comes through, and I empathize strongly not only with the child but also with the parents. The single haiku, while lovely and touching on its own, borrows poignancy from the prose and lends it to the story as well, so that verse and prose are more meaningful together than either would be alone.

~ **First Honorable Mention** ~

**Her Royal Self**

Neal Whitman, Pacific Grove, CA

We sit in the doctor’s office. He faces on the other side of a large desk. He wastes no time. “I have bad news.” I hear the words, “breast cancer,” but he must be talking to someone else in the room. This could not be her chart he is holding.

on his office wall  
photographs of Mt. Fuji  
shortness of breath

In 5 days I drive my wife to the hospital for surgery. One month later she will begin chemotherapy. There is a long list of side effects. She tells me she is not afraid of losing her hair, but of losing her dignity. She marches into her hair salon. “Matt, give me a buzz cut.” “Really?” he asks. She tells Matt what’s up. In no time, he is sweeping her hair off the floor into a dustpan and into the trashcan. She asks, “How much?” “Are you kidding, my dear? This one’s on the house. Come back in 6 months and let’s give you a new hairstyle.”

dawn  
out of muck and mud  
a lotus flower

I come home from work, walk into our living room, and see a princess sitting in my wife's rattan peacock chair. She now goes to the infusion room in the hospital every two weeks for two months. Each visit is a long afternoon. She takes control of the word: she will not use the shorthand word, chemo. She calls it *chemotherapy* with the emphasis that it is therapy: "It is medicine. It is going to save my life." And, it did.

her own Narrow Road  
to the Interior  
one page at a time

~ **Second Honorable Mention** ~

**March**

Lynn McLure, Burnsville, NC

Twenty degrees when I start down to the barn with a north wind blowing at forty to fifty. I push through it, gulping and coughing. Sheep snouts poke through the fence. They start up a noisy pleading when they spot me. Forgot my cell phone and imagine my children are somewhere scolding me. Urgently I pack hay into the feeder as though somehow I can move fast enough to avoid a heart attack until I have my phone again. I am winter weary of long johns and boots and this going up and down on icy gravel. Besides, I've already planted peas. Climbing back uphill I try to outrun the argument between "*I love this mountain like a lover*" and "*I am too damn old to keep this up.*"

bare trees  
shadow dancing  
across my bedspread

~ Third Honorable Mention ~

**Devotions**

Michele Root-Bernstein, East Lansing, MI

My eighty-eight-year-old mother-in-law is on the floor, pulling watercolor paintings I have never seen before from the bottom kitchen cupboard where she stores her artwork. Tomorrow she will have a backache, but for now all I discern is the palimpsest: thirty years ago my toddler son hunkered in moist garden dirt, holding in his outstretched palm a snail, forever crossing.

fiddlehead fern  
how it is we rise  
from the knees

As with the first three winners, it was difficult to choose only three haibun for honorable mention. There were simply too many that touched me on some level. One attempts to judge objectively, and this is fairly easy for me when it comes to passing over those works with glaring errors, distracting repetition, lack of clarity, and dull writing. But surely judging written works on the level of this year's entries must at some point become subjective. When a stack of haibun satisfy technical requirements, those that also evoke emotion, entertain, and invite me to return again and again will naturally rise to the top. After many readings, I finally marked three that refused to relinquish their places. Each in its own way speaks to me.



*Ferris Gilli's work in haiku and related genres has appeared regularly in eminent journals since 1996. Her work has earned awards in more than thirty haiku-related competitions. She frequently judges for prestigious competitions in haiku-related genres. She has been an associate editor of The Heron's Nest since December 2000. Ferris conducted the on-line Hibiscus School of Western Traditional Haiku (sponsored by the World Haiku Club) from January 2001 to April 2002. Her haibun can be found in a variety of journals and anthologies.*