

NO VELCRO HERE



Peter Jastermsky

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for Cheryl, Zoe, and Evan

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“If at first you don’t succeed, then skydiving definitely isn’t for you.”

— Steven Wright

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No Velcro Here

Reader's Choice

With me, it's best to be brief. Like Hemingway, with bullet points.

Kafka cap
every sentence
a trial

Snow Globe

Having outpaced adolescence, you see your old suffering in a snow globe of some far-off place. Every so often, you shake the globe for a reminder of how stormy life can be. Then you set the globe down, ever so gently, lest an avalanche gets loose and buries you.

childhood sketches
so many lives trapped
in one pencil

Priorities

Ever since I was young, I've been drawn to arcane information. Books full of such information are some of my best friends. My all-time best friend is *Floating Obscurities: The Lost Wooden Ships of the Sea's Great Storms*. I devoured each page of Admiral Privy's classic text like a depraved tapeworm.

It's sad that these craft were lost, sunk, or forgotten over the centuries. Still, I have my priorities. I have a better understanding of what's on the ocean bottom than what's now in front of me.

learned shame
I become each word
I mangle

Kerfuffle

Certain words set him off. Words like ‘satchel’ and ‘parcel.’ He prefers his words brief and plain, like ‘bag’ and ‘box.’ Sometimes, words like ‘melancholy’ sneak in, and from this, he can barely recover.

Which is sad, when I think about it. For a certain kind of mood, only melancholy will do.

I want to bring this to his attention. But one look tells me this is not the day to create a kerfuffle.

self-exam
a space left blank
for joy

Brilliant Red Leaf

Life rarely travels a straight path. How it could be any other way? There are no straight rivers and a perfectly straight highway leaves one hypnotized.

Even perfectly fine statues have issues. One statue I examine closely has pant legs that are quite wide to the ankle. As a result, the statue looks like it is wearing bellbottoms. Nothing that a fine tailor can't fix, unless you're a rusting hulk with tiny feet.

None of this matters, of course, unless you seek logic in life. Today, it made sense to seek solace from a well-placed authority. The universe answers my question with a wonderful reply—a brilliant red leaf falls in my path at just the right moment.

Over time, the story will be remarkably similar. Good answers don't travel in herds; you have to seek them out. Today, a haibun searches for its haiku.

timeless goals
the things
we never get to

Tiny Murders

It's the visceral feeling in one's foot, the unforgiving sound one remembers. You accidentally crush a snail. Your foot soon settles after meeting a brief resistance.

One does not aspire to tiny murders. The descending shadow of your foot should have been a dead giveaway. It is the duty of the small to proceed with caution. The footsteps now rushing towards you will soon have their own lesson to learn.

This is the most tragedy two can share and still stay strangers.

hard freeze
the fireplace remembers
which secrets we burn

Florida

All afternoon, the palmetto bugs make their bodies the thickness of paper. So the cereal stays in the oven. Bread, too, double-bagged in plastic.

Half of Ontario's here again this year. Have they learned the trick, this secret of survival?

winter fingers
hard to fathom
eating an orange

That One Unforgettable Song

What does a person do after his song is recorded, banned, then re-released, and becomes a Top Ten hit? What if the song concerns a man driven insane by his dog?

They're coming to take me away, ha, ha, he sings. A studio concoction, so politically incorrect, only Dr. Demento will touch him.

If this song is your legacy, you now entertain at children's parties. With guitar and harmonica, you breeze through your repertoire, keeping up a sardonic commentary. Remarks meant for the parents present, and your self-respect. Because once you've been taken away, it's hard to return for an encore. But a second act? Now, that's possible.

distant relative
far enough away
the name escapes me

No Velcro Here

The good thing about forgetting stuff is that you rarely repeat yourself. Stuff comes, stuff goes. They like to tell you, “That’s not what you said!” The emphasis varies by listener and agitation level. Yeah, maybe I said it. Maybe I didn’t. It might have been important. Possibly, but probably not.

road’s end...
slammed in neutral
for eternity

The Burning

Everything in the world is flammable.

If the chemistry is right, anything can go up.

I want to be safe in this world where *nothing* feels safe.

So, I start playing with matches, those sturdy stick matches.
I love their smell, their sense of danger, when I light them
away from home.

The beauty of the match as it explodes into heat and light—
this is how I control fire. In time, I will tell my friends.

But the flame and heat, I keep to myself.

batten down
how the past still
catches wind

Ginsberg's Napkin

In the early 1970's, when I was barely 20, I attended a poetry reading by the late Beat poet Allen Ginsberg. After the reading was over, and the cloud of incense smoke had started to lift, the audience was able to approach Ginsberg, who did not seem uncomfortable with his celebrity status.

When I could finally get next to Ginsberg, I stared into his beard and asked him how he “came up” with his poems. Along with signing a paper napkin for me, Ginsberg wrote the words “First Thought, Best Thought” under his signature. Over the years, Ginsberg's napkin disappeared, but his pithy words stay with me.

reality sandwich
a long reach
through hyperbole

Garage Art

The door raises, and you see it. Hanging on the walls, yes, but there must be a mistake. This isn't the right room for it, but another door raises, and you see still more, secured in neat rows, as if for a private viewing. Now you can't help but peer in when the last door raises, because you wonder if there's a secret movement brewing.

Art in garages. How did it get there? Your mind races ahead. What stuff gets hung in the garage? Is it the too weird or the too good, or simply the too old and dusty for the house? And who decides what gets hung in the garage? The art has to compete with the car or two that shares its space. You've yet to see a pinup of a Porsche vying for attention with *Starry, Starry Night*.

Or perhaps we've reached the point in our development that a bare wall, even in a garage, is intolerable. Something must be hung to populate the wall, be it an old map...or a velvet Elvis.

tailspin...
the imagination takes
to free fall

Detained

“More coffee for you?”

My waitress has an accent that’s not from here. It’s the fourth time she’s asked. I feel bad turning her away.

On the morning news, no one is asking the crestfallen girl if she’s thirsty or comforting the tearful boy who’s missing his favorite toy. I think of my own two children, free enough to launch themselves. Not that parenting is ever really done...

Somewhere, there’s a father, and a mother, holding it all in, wondering what place they’ll call home.

returning
when they want –
morning glories

Closing Time

Even on a busy night, one café table stays empty.

But it's not the same table each time. Instead, the table rotates. It's all done by chance; a table assigns itself to this nightly chore. But, no matter, such strangeness serves a purpose. All the bad luck and trouble that's ever occurred in the café gathers in this one table.

Perhaps, one night, after too much courage, someone will insist on sitting there...

lazy Susan
another round
of life lessons

What's Up with Your Weather?

In the future, everyone will welcome the weather with their bones.
It's the ultimate "real feel."

You'll know Stormy Monday before it arrives and can soon tell if
Tuesday's just as bad.

You come to realize you don't need a weatherman to know which
way the Santa Ana winds blow.

It's good your eyes still have their own dew point. Some things never
change...

May flurries –
the sudden brush
of ambivalence

The New Chicken Little

For as long as we've been alive, the sky has been falling. It's a sentiment that has been cheapened through overuse. We're tired of it, frankly. Do what we say, sky, and we'll shut up about it.

We can only keep this up for so long.

leaving the house
our hardhats
just in case

The Clay Bathers

Dirt never interests us much. We prefer our earth with plenty of water. But more than mud, it is rich, deep clay. Brown, black, and gray all at once. You know it by its feel. Cool and hot together. Religion and sex, finally, in one handful.

Like night filling a galaxy, we cover ourselves. Skins of intrigue, of stealth.

From clay, we offer this planet our shapes of mystery. And, until morning, the undressing of speech.

first scent...
the pheromones
a match

Cresting

The ending arrives on a wave no one hears coming. Someone is swept away, the others fret about their footing.

stuffed animals...
the children's toy box
stays dark



Photo courtesy: Zoe Hoffman Jastermsky

Peter Jastermsky writes short-form works, with a focus on haiku, senryu, cherita, and haibun. His writing has appeared in many print and online journals and anthologies. A licensed clinical social worker, Peter has worked as a counselor in a variety of settings for over 30 years. His first haiku and senryu collection is *Steel Cut Moon*, published by Cholla Needles Press. Peter and his family live in the high desert of Southern California.

“Don’t let the brevity and humor of Peter Jastermsky’s haibun mislead you. Below that is a layer of experience we can all too readily identify with. And underpinning it all is a sense of wonder—or at least a sense of amused surprise. In fact, the prose can sometimes be so diverting that it’s easy to miss how spot on the haiku and senryu are. There may be “no Velcro here,” but these haibun will stick with you for some time to come.”

— Bob Lucky, Editor of *Contemporary Haibun Online*