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13 April 2021

Hiking and Haiku

When thinking of hiking, I get reminded of how peaceful and calming the walks tend to be. Its an escape from reality and has always helped me when it came to my mental health many times. Being an active hiker was always something that I was most proud of, as it makes me appreciate a side of the world that not everyone wants or cares to experience. Hiking has brought me and many others to beautiful, breath-taking destinations in which I am grateful that I could see these wonderful places. As someone who usually hikes by themselves or with one other partner, I have never had the experience of larger groups for hiking. When I do come across people hiking along the same trails as me, I have never had a poor experience as I feel the community of hikers are positive people who are just wanting to see what nature has to offer. But I have always wanted to know what other people use hiking for, or what they think about when it comes to hiking. My conversations with hikers are too few and far in between to truly know what other people are thinking in the sense of hiking. For me personally, I always think about my current life problems and past problems, though sometimes I just concentrate on where I am walking if the trail gets a little difficult.

When it came to choosing the haiku that I am going to talk about later in this essay, at first, I did not want to have the same authors throughout the haiku. I found this website that seems to specialize in haiku in different areas of Colorado, which is known for its many hiking spots and beautiful landscapes. Looking at these haiku, I found that a lot of them had multiple authors, as I come to find that it is because some of them go on hikes together and write them together. I find this to be interesting as the haiku from those issues are unique, but all have a similar style. Because of this discovery, I chose to go with several haiku that had the same or multiple authors as well as choosing haiku that I felt were interesting to me when it came to the feeling of hiking.

heel toe, heel toe
how many steps does it take to
pound out this grief?

Sara Benson, Susan Evans, Patrick Lynn, Jonathan Machen, *Issue #166*, 15

I wanted to start out with this haiku since the feeling that this haiku evokes is what I feel a lot of people who go hiking understand. I started hiking because of grief that was in my life and I did not have a way of letting go or thinking about it because of the distractions that the city offers. Nature gives people a quiet and calm space to think about your life since there are no distractions and the deeper into the hike you go, the more you come to terms with the hardships of your life currently. This haiku takes it to that level of a constant state of grief and how they are taking this time of hiking to accept it. This makes me think that some people who turn to hiking because of grief, hike for as long as they can and tend not to turn back until they can come to a conclusion. The last line speaks to me in the sense that this person is struggling the most with their grief and has been going on this hike for a while. I can sense through this haiku that this person could be struggling with their grief for much longer so you could tell that this person could be someone close to them and significant in their life.

happily chucking
smooth white branches
into the river one by one

Patrick Lynn and Jonathan Machen, *Issue #119*, 20

This next haiku is less of a feeling and more of an action that seems to happen to everyone who goes on long hikes that come to an end at a river or creek. I feel like a lot of hikers take along some small lunches and snacks with them along their hikes since hiking causes you to burn a lot of calories. At the end of trails that have rivers, I tend to bring a bigger lunch so I can relax along the edge of the river to enjoy the sights. Though I know that people are not supposed to throw sticks and rocks into rivers, I feel that people still do it for fun to watch the stick go by down the river. When throwing sticks into the river, it is always interesting seeing which way the river takes it as sometimes it gets picked up by a different current and goes down the river in a different way from the last. This haiku makes me think that most people find this enjoyable as rivers and the current is somehow fascinating to people. I like to think that it is because people do not usually live around areas where there are rivers, therefore, it is like you are living a part of your childhood that you never got to enjoy as people of all ages throw sticks into rivers. I feel that if there is a group of people, they would enjoy throwing sticks and having a little race to see whose stick is faster than the others.

desert so fragile
even my subtle footprints
cause me to cringe

Jonathan Machen, *Issue #150*, 20

This is a haiku that I thoroughly enjoy as someone who hiked in the desert most of the time at the beginning of my hiking journey. I have always wondered if other hikers thought of the same things as I saw my footprints being left behind along with a few others. I always thought that it was interesting that the desert sand showed the footprints of people so easily, and it always made me worried about what it was doing to that patch of earth that was our walkways. I always imagined footprints from years ago buried underneath the hundreds more footprints that were left behind. This haiku makes me think about the many times I thought that leaving footprints behind in the ground was sad and how it reminded me of how easily the earth could be ruined by people. Especially when it came to something as fragile as the desert, I always felt protective of it as my state of Arizona has always been on top of making sure the nature and wildlife of the desert was untouched. Looking at places like the Grand Canyon, I have always felt a little sad that they made the trails accessible to tourists who seem to not care about the earth as much as people who hike in those areas. Along the many paths of footprints left behind, there is also the problem of plastic and trash left behind by those who do not care much for the environment that they are in. This haiku makes me happy in the fact that I am not the only one who thinks this way when it comes to certain trails and how they also think about the damage that they could possibly be doing by going along on these trails.

shedding my concerns
melting into the shadow
of river canyon

Susan Peterson, Krista Morien, Robert Power, Patrick Lynn and Jonathan Machen, *Issue #129*, 17

This haiku starts to go back to the feeling that hiking promotes on the trails. Going back to the first haiku, one could tell that the haiku was talking about the grief of a close friend or loved one. For this haiku starting at the first line, you could tell that this person is having difficulty with possibly school or even work life. When hiking, I feel as if you must think about the problems you are having within your life because there are no distraction of internet or other people. Its almost like a different type of therapy in where nature gives you the space to fully think through the problems of your life. With the next few lines of this haiku, you could tell that this person is starting to overcome their issues as they continue to walk along this path along this canyon. I feel that with the line of the shadows in the canyon, the author is letting the reader know that they have been walking for a while as the sun starts to cast shadows onto this canyon.

up and down
skins on, skins off
frigid chill at top

Jonathan, David Teitler and Varadaan, *Issue #122*, 15

This haiku takes it back to actions that happen during hikes instead of feeling. Constantly the weather is changing throughout the day depending on when you start your hikes, so it is always a good idea to wear more layers at the beginning of your hikes so you can take them off as you go. I feel that this reminds me the most of when I went hiking in the smokie mountains during the beginning of spring, so it was till a little cold with the afternoons being warm. I like this haiku because I feel like I have other people understand the struggles of taking off and putting on layers throughout the hike as it takes some time to also shove them into your hiking packs. I also feel like it could be a little annoying when you are trying to enjoy your hike, but you are being constantly stopped by the weather and your layers. I like to think that this person could be hiking up to the smokie mountains like I did, and how when you get to the top of the many mountains, it starts to get a lot colder.

snow and silence
entire basin to myself
just outside of town

Jonathan Machen, *Issue #150*,42

This next haiku gives a lot of feeling when it comes to the visuals of the lines. I feel like this hiker has a trail that is not very well known that he keeps to himself to go on long hikes with. I can imagine that this person had a very rough week or day and just needed to get out of the town for a while to collect his thoughts. I like to think that this person could see the town clearly on the top of this basin, and how he can watch the town from afar. I have always felt that not a lot of people like to go hiking in the snow because of the cold and possibly ice, but I have always felt that snow adds more to the trail and makes it more enjoyable. I have not met a lot of hikers who like to hike in the snow, so I feel like I tend to enjoy those hiking trails by myself during those times. I can imagine that this hiker and I understand the peace of those snowy hikes as the snow drowns out almost all sound. Its almost as if the snow drowns out sounds of towns and makes the sounds of streams and wildlife a lot more prominent.

at the summit
insects feasting
on my legs

Jonathan Machen, David Teitler and Michael Contil, *Issue #155*, 14

This haiku makes me understand something about hiking that I have yet to experience during my own hikes. As someone who does not want to get sunburn, I have always been the type to wear thin layers of long sleeves and pants, which has caused me to not have as many bug bites as others. Wearing hiking pants gives me the opportunity to stay cool, out of the sun and away from any bugs that might want to bite my legs. I like this haiku in the sense that it shows me what other hikers could be thinking about when it comes to the bugs on those hikes. I can imagine how annoying and frustrating it could be to have a constant stream of bugs at your calves and how no matter how much bug spray you use, they continue to come back. I feel that with the second line of this haiku, this person could be dealing with a lot of insects and how they could be desperate at this point to get rid of them.

clear plastic bottle
lodged amongst red sandstone
must be number two

Susan Peterson, Krista Morien, Robert Power, Patrick Lynn and Jonathan Machen, *Issue #129*, 15

I wanted to show this last haiku as a fun note to the end of these haiku full of meaning and wonder. Though I take hiking as a form of self-reflection, it does not mean that every hiking trip I have has to do with some form of issue that is going on in my life. Other times that I go hiking, I go with friends and we have a fun time observing nature. I feel that my friend always like to act a little crazy when it comes to hiking and always make fun of each other. I can imagine one of my friends having to go number two during a hike and how we just sit there waiting for them to be done while making fun of them at the same time. Having this haiku reminds me of the fun times that I have during hikes that are not by myself and I get reminded of how easy it is to make memories on trips like these.

Going through these hiking haiku made me realize a lot when it came to how other people feel when they go on hikes. I now understand that most people feel the same way when it comes to hiking and share some of the same experiences. I felt that I was able to see myself and my memories in all these haiku and relive those memories through those haiku. When I first started reading these haiku, I did not think that a lot of people share the same value when it comes to hiking and how I use it as a source of therapy. Now, after reading many haiku about hiking, I can say with confidence that a lot of people use hiking as a form of therapy and using the trails to think about the hard times in their lives. When it came to the haiku about certain experiences, like throwing sticks into a river, I never thought that it was an activity that a lot of people also have experienced as well as the constant taking off and putting on layers throughout a hike. I felt like I really connected with the haiku about the desert being fragile, as it seemed like the author and I shared the same feelings about how much people do not take care of the hikes that they go on.

In the end, I believe that hiking is a good activity that anyone who is willing to go out and enjoy nature can do. I feel like it is a powerful activity in which you can think about your worries and leave them behind once you come to the end of the trail. With these haiku, I finally understand what other people use hiking for as well as the thoughts that they have when it comes to their

travels. Because of this, I do not have to think of every hiker as a stranger, but now think of them as someone who is along the same journey as me and how we are all just trying to better ourselves through walks in nature.

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