

Convicts Shoot The Breeze



Johnny Baranski



Convicts Shoot The Breeze

Haiku

by Johnny Baranski



Block prints by Diana Bowers

PREFACE

Prison haiku? Why not. In prison, stripped and emptied of all that is meaningless, the haiku poet is held captive instead by images that reflect the true nature of liberation.

— Johnny Baranski

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For Karol
and for Michael

Snohomish County Jail:
even in this place
haiku moments

After a strip search
old inmates, new inmates
in blue prison garb

April sun slanting
across the exercise yard
jail bars' shadows

Basketball stops
in the exercise yard—
convicts shoot the breeze



This heat!
snow-clad mountains framed
by the cell block window

Independence Day—
just what are we celebrating
behind prison walls

Sleepless night—
moon-cast cell bars' shadows
lay on the stone cot



Moonlit spider
web weaving
cell bar to cell bar

Prevailing wind!
neither prison bars nor spider web
yield to it

Chilly morning —
in the jailhouse spider web
hangs a fly

As the fog lifts
the prison's gray stone walls
reach for the sky

Starting a new month
in Snohomish County Jail;
same old teabag



With one pencil
dwindling to a nub
long jail term

Jail visitor:
the warmth of her eyes
through bulletproof glass

On the jail cell wall
a faded orange
Ladybug



From the jailyard
the sound of rioting
hailstones

New Year —
prisoner looks through
the empty calendar

Prison lights out
drifting off to distant places
a train whistle

The prison walls
have shortened overnight!
First snow

Off prison barbed wire
snow taking
the edge

From the prison watchtower
there is a very good view
of the moon too

The road home
beyond the prison wall:
deepening snow

Jail time:
as it grows shorter
my growing beard

END NOTES

Snohomish County Jail is in Everett, Washington, where the author served time for nuclear weapons protests. Some of these prison haiku first appeared in *Brussels Sprout*, *Frogpond*, *Modern Haiku*, and the anthology, *to find the words*.

Johnny Baranski makes his home in Portland, Oregon, and his living as a bookkeeper. He has been writing haiku since 1975 and is the author of four other chapbooks: *Silent Silos: a counterBOMB haiku sequence*; *Fish Pond Moon*; *Hitch Haiku*; and *Pencil Flowers: Jai Haiku*.

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