

# “Daily Exercise”, “America”, “I Tell My Children”



SPACES BETWEEN US / *image by Amalie Flynn*

**daily  
exercise (haiku)**

my morning poems  
have begun to sound like Tweets  
fragments of bird song

**America**

we  
best reflect

the  
spaces between us

when  
we stand

together

**I tell my children**

to clean their own rooms  
to play fair and make right  
to always do

the best they can.

And then I apologize  
that I am not leaving them  
a better world  
than my own.

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## New Poetry from Randy Brown

### victory conditions

My father taught me  
to say *I love you*  
every time  
you stood in the door

left for school  
went to work  
flew off to war

it became a habit  
a good one  
like checking the tires  
or clicking your seat belt

but now  
every conversation feels  
like a movement to contact

we took the same vows  
we swore the same oaths  
we wore the same uniform  
we see the same news

I raise my kids

like he did his  
and have the same hopes for them

How is it that we now live  
in two countries?

### **three more tanka from Des Moines, Iowa**

1.

The leafblower drone  
buzzes into consciousness—  
fast cicada hum.  
I wave to the new police,  
before I close the window.

2.

Yellow Little Bird  
hovers near high-voltage lines  
conducting repairs  
outside my bedroom window,  
but I am miles away.

3.

Thunder and popcorn;  
a remembered joke about  
the “sound of freedom.”  
In rain, I stand listening  
as rifles prepare for war.

### **a future space force marine writes haiku**

1.

This drop won't kill you—

terminal velocity  
varies by planet.

2.

We spiral dirt-ward,  
samaras in early fall,  
sowing destruction.

3.

Reconnaissance drones  
orbit our squad's position:  
Expanding beachhead.

4.

"Almost" only counts  
in horseshoes and hand grenades.  
Go toss them a nuke.

5.

If war is still hell,  
at least my bounding mech suit  
is air-conditioned.



"An American pineapple, of the kind the Axis finds hard to digest, is ready to leave the hand of an infantryman in training at Fort Belvoir, Va, 1944. American soldiers make good grenade throwers."

**This is just to Say All Again After ...**

*after William Carlos Williams' "This is Just to Say"*

I have expended  
the "pineapples"  
that were in

the ammo box

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for final protective fires

Forgive me  
they were explosive  
so frag  
and so bold

**Most Likely /  
Most Dangerous Enemy Courses of Action**

what most  
threatens my children

social media /  
unending war

the rat race /  
the daily grind

half-baked policies /  
global warming

a lack of hope /  
a lack of justice

my constant distraction /  
my constant distraction

**the stand**

if you can't stand injustice  
take a knee

if you pray for others  
take a knee

if you believe in freedom, not fabric  
let others see

you practice  
what you preach

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## **New Poetry by Randy Brown**



PHOTO:

Marie-Lan  
Nguyen. Bust  
of Homer

## **Toward an understanding of war and poetry, told (mostly) in aphorisms**

Poetry is the long war of narrative.

Poetry, like history, is subjective.

If journalism is the first draft of history, poetry is the  
last scrap.

Poets set the stage of victory. Just ask Homer: Who won the  
ball game?

Do not make fun of war poets. A war poet will cut you.

War is hell. Poetry is easier to read. But each takes time.

Any war poem is a final message home.

Poetry can survive fragmentation. Irradiation. Ignorance.

Poetry can cheat death. Poetry has all the time in the world.  
Poetry will outlast us all.

Poetry is a cockroach.

"History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme."—Mark Twain

"Twain didn't actually say that."—John Robert Colombo

John Robert Colombo is a poet.

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*Notes: While John Robert Colombo incorporated the popular "history rhymes" quotation—which he then attributed to Mark Twain—into his 1970 work, "A Said Poem," he later privately reported he was uncertain of its origins. And, despite the poetic construction here, Colombo himself never said, "Twain didn't actually say that."*

*In an 1874 introduction to "The Gilded Age: A Tale of To-Day," co-written with Charles Dudley Warner, Twain apparently did say, "History never repeats itself, but the Kaleidoscopic combinations of the pictured present often seem to be constructed out of the broken fragments of antique legends."*

*History prefers Colombo's version. So do I.*



PHOTO: Spc. Leslie Goble,

U.S. Army. A soldier peeks  
out of the "Death Star."  
The outpost overlooks  
Combat Outpost Najil and is  
manned by soldiers 24 hours  
a day.

## the bottlefall at COP Najil

in summer sun, a plastic waterfall cascades,  
the emptied residue of our Afghan brothers  
encamped along the ridge just across from the fortress  
we call the Death Star.

above and below, a Scout Weapons Team buzzes up  
and down the valley, TIE fighters searching for a truck  
full of fertilizer, a bomb waiting for us  
to happen.

we have taught the Afghans well: That water  
comes only in bottles. That cowboys don't  
care for the desert. That our brand of war  
is sustainable.

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*Notes: The acronym "COP," pronounced "kahp," stands for  
"Combat Outpost." A "TIE fighter" is a fictional*

*spacecraft—one that is powered by “Twin Ion Engines”—that first appeared in the 1977 movie “Star Wars.”*

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## **the homecoming game, a war sonnet**



PHOTO: Jessica Blanton. Navy Petty Officer Jeff Howard surprises his mother and grandmother at a Falcons Preseason Game at the Georgia Dome. Petty Officer Howard's mother, Tina, thought he was still in Afghanistan. DVIDS worked with the Falcons to coordinate the emotional homecoming.

Friends and countrymen, lend us your eyes  
—the half-time tribute our G.I.s deserve!  
For patriots' love, a gladiatorial surprise:  
one family's tears on your behalf observe!  
Our man behind curtains will soon appear  
to his kids and young hot wife transported  
from Afghanistan to home so dear,  
their kiss upon a Jumbotron distorted!

Then, attend these soapful sponsored messages:

Your focus on this spectacle so pure

will wash your laundries and your sins in stages

gentle, scent-free, and all-temperature!

For we, about to cry, salute our troops—

their sacrifice played in commercial loops.

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# three tanka from Des Moines, Iowa

## Spring 2016

1.



PHOTO: Spc. Emily Walter, U.S. Army. Cadets file into a Chinook helicopter to begin the Ranger Challenge, Nov. 3 at Camp Dodge, Iowa. The challenge consists of several tactical training events that test the soldiers' physical and mental capabilities.

A flock of Black Hawks

thudding through our barren trees

announces March drill.

In springtime, comes the fighting,  
but we wait for the Chinook.

2.

With ceremony,

Old Man assembles his troops.

It is Mother's Day;

sons and daughters are leaving  
in order to sustain war.

3.

Conex boxes stacked

in the Starbucks parking lot

bring back memories

of making war and coffee.

I miss the old neighborhood.

**Randy "Sherpa" Brown** embedded with his former Iowa Army National Guard unit as a civilian journalist in Afghanistan, May-June 2011. He authored the poetry collection *Welcome to FOB Haiku: War Poems from Inside the Wire* (Middle West Press, 2015). His work has appeared widely in literary print and online publications. As "Charlie Sherpa," he blogs about military culture at: [www.redbullrising.com](http://www.redbullrising.com).