
REVIEWS

Downhill Home by Chuck Brickley (United Kingdom: Snapshot Press, 2025) 114 pages. 5" × 7¾". Four-color card covers; perfect bound. ISBN: 978-1-903543-61-0. Price: \$20.00 from the author: <https://www.chuck-brickley.com>

Reviewed by Randy Brooks

Downhill Home is Chuck Brickley's second recently published collection. The book opens with a beautiful, two-page, run-on sentence of all the places and times and emotional states of being that he calls home: "from rural British Columbia where my wife and I lived for most of our lives to the southwestern edge of San Francisco" and "from various dwellings along the banks of wild rivers to the house where I met her family on our first date" and "from a small town where few people live on the streets to a city where thousands do" and ... "from the joys and heartaches of raising a family to those of caring for my wife's widowed father during his last years" and "from an aging person long inspired by communing with nature to one also bearing witness to our troubled city, country, planet" ... and ending with "from hope flowering in dreams to hope rooted in our times." Let me share a few of his haiku and how they invoke these various feelings of being at home.

rolling down
the back windows too
smell of the sea

This haiku invites us to enjoy a leisurely drive along the coast. All the windows are down to take in as much of this refreshing sea air as possible. We arrive with our noses before reaching the destination. Although there

is no mention of family, I imagine a fully loaded car with everyone ready for an adventure down by the sea.

the bird feeder two yards down
never empty
this long before

Brickley's haiku invokes our memories of neighbors and how we sometimes know them by their activity (or in this case inactivity) in their yards. A haiku about noticing something absent is always a challenge and leads us to wonder why. Maybe the bird feeder is not the only thing empty, two yards down.

financial district
a man does his business
on the sidewalk

Not everyone who lives in the financial district goes home every evening. Some stay and continue to do their "business" where they live. Who owns the sidewalk? For some of us it is home. There are all kinds of dirty business done in the financial district—some indoors in offices and some in the streets or sidewalks.

moonlit clouds
a hardball stuck high
in the backdrop

The fun of this haiku is the movement of perception from the empty ball-field to the cloudy sky. As we look up at the moonlit clouds, we expect a glimpse of the moon. Instead, our eyes discover the hardball which is round and white like a moon. It is a pleasant surprise and leads to speculation about how that ball ended up in the backdrop. Was it a wild pop-up foul ball? Did some kids hit it up there for fun? Who's missing the ball? The ball seems quite at home, and in some odd way, fitting as an orb in the sky this cloudy night.

sunken hardhat
 a few minnows resting
 from the current

Making the best of the shelter provided by a sunken hardhat, the minnows have found a great place to rest from their constant battle with the current. They get to stay in place, sheltered for now, even though the helmet appears to be lost and out of place. One man's trash is a lot of minnows' treasure.

one by one
 the widower waters
 her flowers

I loved this haiku the first time I read it and was glad to feature it with a painting for the cover of an issue of *Mayfly* magazine. What I love about this haiku is the attention to detail and inherited nurturing care of the widower after the loss of his partner. I can imagine that as she was in failing health, she gave him instructions on the necessary care of the flowers. He dutifully cared for her as well as her flowers and now this is part of her legacy. Carefully watering the flowers one by one is his way of continuing to care for her. She may have passed on but her flowers continue to thrive as part of their home.

backfire
 the senator flinches
 in his pew

As we know all too well, often we find ourselves living in troubled communities and troubled times. Unfortunately, too often this is our home as well. In this haiku the senator is back in the local church, in his or her usual pew, which should be a place of sanctuary and peace. But a backfire from the street sounds too much like gunfire, and the senator reacts instinctively by flinching. I can imagine the senator ducking or hunching over for a moment, hoping to not be a target of some crazed mass shooter.

regrets
out here raking
every last one

Another haiku about taking care of the home. In this case we start with the simple yard activity of raking up leaves, but, of course, with haiku we know that there is a more significant underlying meaning. The leaves need raked but so too do we need to tend our spiritual selves. We need to take care of our own mental health and address regrets and mistakes of the past. Like the Zen comic, the young disciple can never get all of the leaves perfectly raked up. And as we remember and tend to our lives, we can never get rid of every last regret. It's only natural that the next wind, the next storm, will bring a renewal of fallen leaves.

The title poem slants one word at a time across two pages near the end of the book. It goes: *autumn / again / crossing / the / stream / down / hill / home* (108-109). This layout suggests the energy of the person hiking down the hill same as the water in the stream. Both are headed home, pulled by the gravity of the hill.

The final haiku is noted to be a "ghost track," which comes from an untitled track on a music recording. You can miss it if you're not careful. *Downhill Home's* ghost track follows the endnotes on the last page before the back cover flaps. Spoiler alert. This haiku is an out of this world one liner!

just one more cartwheel the Milky Way

Don't miss out on this gem of a haiku collection! Take it for your own cartwheel through this universe we call home.