

First Place Personal Growth Category

Judge's Comment: After many readings of all the entries and much back and forth between the strongest, I have chosen "New Songs" as the 1st Place winner. This poet's ability to tell a story of the struggle with alcohol is memorable. The title suggests the very effective central metaphor. This soothing musical thread (contrasted against the harsh realities of a drinker's life) is gracefully woven throughout the poem. Surprising use of humor, unique word choice and fresh imagery all combine here to create a powerful picture of a person who has learned through pain to turn their life around for the better.

New Songs

by Aaron Holst, Sheridan, Wy.

I answer the door, smell last night's sweat,
catch quick-down eyes oozing hangover.

His toolbox bangs to the floor,
"I hear your garbage disposal just hums,

doesn't know the words!"
"Nor the tune," I add.

Under the sink, he whistles
dry, fuzzy cotton ball notes.

I know his song – swollen,
coughing, gagging throat,

congested, vibrating head
forever trying to tune

night-before harmony of
bar puke and smoke, breath of

line-dancin' damsels gone sour.
The dissonance of drinking

to live, drinking to die –
A tune I no longer carry.

We two hum along, whistle our own ways,
his, for the next binge,

mine, for the words
to new songs.

