

Telling a story in 140 characters or less

June 19 2009, by Chris Lefkow



TV personality Martha Stewart presents Twitter co-founder Biz Stone with the Breakout Webby of the Year during the 13th Annual Webby Awards at Cipriani Wall Street on June 8. Scores of authors, poets and other creative types who are downsizing their literary talents to the limited format of the hot micro-blogging service.

Arjun Basu writes short stories. Very short stories.

"I'm doing 140-character stories on [Twitter](https://twitter.com)," said Basu, one of scores of authors, poets and other creative types who are downsizing their literary talents to the limited format of the hot micro-blogging service.

"I call them Twisters because everything on Twitter has a stupid name," the 42-year-old Basu told AFP at the 140 Characters Conference, a two-day talkfest devoted to all things Twitter held in New York this week.

"Each story has a beginning, a middle and an end," said Basu, a Canadian, who readily acknowledges that he has developed a greater following on Twitter than for his more traditionally published works.

"I'm now at over 6,000 followers on Twitter," the Montreal-based Basu said. "I published a book of short stories last year and that was with a small press so maybe 2,000 people bought the book.

"So I have more readers now than I used to."

Basu, whose Twitter handle is @arjunbasu, said he began writing the Twisters last year.

"I started with one story. I had an image in my head and I just did it," he said. "And I slowly built up a following."

"They went out hunting. They killed some large mammals. Later they saw the animals butchered. And one by one they ordered salads that evening," reads one of Basu's Twisters.

"The marriage didn't survive the honeymoon. They acknowledged the majesty of their mistake. But they remained together. Because of the gifts," goes another.

Haiku, which lends itself to the 140-character format, is another popular literary form on Twitter and the search term #haiku occasionally rises into Twitter's list of "Trending Topics," the 10 most popular topics on the site.

"And in the middle / of the rising city heat / the fountain is dry," reads a Haiku from a Twitter user and poet with more than 3,800 followers who goes by the handle of @LadyParadis.

Websites have also popped up collecting the best of Twitter Haiku -- known variously as Twaiku or TwiHaiku -- and many users take part weekly in what is called Haiku Thursday.

Basu, who works in the magazine industry, said he has been surprised at the reception his byte-sized stories have received. "Things that I couldn't have imagined," he said.

"Some people have been using my stories in classes -- English as a second language, creative writing," he said. "There's one guy who's translated a bunch of them into Portuguese. Another guy who's translated them into Italian."

"I did find an agent and we're trying to figure out what to do with this," Basu said. "Publishers are trying to wrap their heads around it. They're having a hard time with Twitter in general I think."

Basu said he had also been contacted by Filminute, the international film festival dedicated to the best one-minute films.

"They've been putting me in touch with some directors," he said. "My Twisters may become the source for some really short movies."

Basu said one of the most satisfying things about Twitter was that it was a "great connector."

"As a writer you get instant feedback which for a writer is like catnip," he said. "You get this feedback immediately after you've sent something out."

"It makes the whole process a lot less lonely in a way."

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