

Lunch at the Nursing Home
by Matthew A. Nelson
Christmas, 2005

Now old and gray,
they sit quietly -
at least most are quiet -
lined up for lunch,
slowly propelling themselves
along the rail, grasping it
with both hands that are
frail and liver-spotted.

Some have the tremors
and others slobber,
they have lost control
of their aging bodies
so strong for so many years.
One nearly blind woman moans,
“Please help me, I am so ill,
I don’t know where I am at”.

The wheels on the chairs are
massive enough to drive a
steam locomotive. Indeed,
they look like the drive
wheels on a locomotive.
This train has not one,
but one hundred engineers,
each of whom lived other careers.

Farmers, teachers, bankers,
truck drivers, postal workers,
secretaries, machinists,
sailors, soldiers, marines, pilots
accountants, lawyers, builders,
carpenters, nurses, doctors –
now they need the help of nurse’s aids
who go home when their shift is over.

Twenty or twenty-five years ago
these people were my age.
They had lived full lives,
were once young, newly married,
rejoiced at their children’s births,
taught Sunday School,
travelled world wide,
grieved when their parents died.

This generation of men had survived
World War II; others their age had not.

They had flown many airplanes,
such as B-17s, P-38s, B-24s, P-51s.
They lived through the attacks
on Pearl Harbor and the horrors at
Iwo Jima and Omaha Beach.
They fought for freedom.

“Rosie the Riveter” they called her
during the same war.
When the war was over,
and her man came back home,
she baked homemade bread,
raised the children,
drove them to school,
and shared in the growth of America.

Houses and shopping malls
did these people build.
They drilled for oil and
helped send men to the moon.
Some made it big in
politics and the financial world.
Others fed the nation
as they raised wheat and cows.

Children, grand-children,
Great-grandchildren, and for some,
Great-Great-grandchildren.
These patriarchs and matriarchs
now roam the halls of the nursing home;
some are well dressed and lively,
while others need help
to go to the bathroom.

Many of them share meals together
at the same table, laughing.
Others need help eating
their cottage cheese.
They used to eat pork chops or steak.
Probably any woman in the home
used to be able to cook
better food than what they are now served.

Most of these people know
that is their last home on this earth.
Some pray to die;
others may pray to remain strong.
Almost all believe in God, family and country,
and would bristle at the notion
of a few people not wanting to leave
Christ in Merry Christmas.