

Nursing Home (2013)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

It's hard to see these fallen heroes, the passing of the generation torch from those who fought and won the Big War and sling-shot us into Space Travel: but a nursing home in Huntsville shows the way.

They sit mostly silently in the social room, waiting for the doors to lunch to open. Here is the man who worked with von Braun, still active, story-teller. Here's someone from NASA, who's forgotten what those letters stood for. Here's a veteran from Army Missile Command, Redstone Arsenal, leaving the defending of our envelope of atmosphere to "new kids on the block," his time of scaring the Soviet Union fulfilled. Another woman, frail in powder-blue kerchief in her wheelchair, maintains the Long Silence, more than half-way over the dividing space 'twixt here and there.

I admire those who care for them; I, incarcerated for a much shorter time than eternity, appreciate the gentle humor that affects this coterie of compassion, opening up those tepid meal containers from the storage wagon, moving quickly table to table to set out food, and then, with some, patiently spoon it into a mouth that opens on command: "Here, sweetheart; here, my dear; here, honey, open up!"

Some speak of exit plans, their time of stricture ending next week, next month. That's my bunch. But here is one sweet woman, bound to her chair, jailed in her mind, who looks out at nowhere and repeats the mantra, every so often. She looks at nothing, or perhaps at everything in the past: "It's okay," she says from time to time, when it fills her up and she cannot keep it in: "It's okay. It's okay." I'm glad it is.