

Introduction

The subject of this year's poem once again came from our esteemed leader, Lou. When I mentioned that I was trying to come up with a theme, Lou suggested that I write about 50th Company turning 80, since this is the year that many of our classmates reach that august age. And for the young whippersnappers like myself who aren't there yet – we will be before the year is out.

Rather than trying to tell the story of the whole class, I've decided that it would be better to focus on one individual who can represent us all. And that person is... let's see – nope, it's nobody in our audience. In fact, it's not even a real person. It's that fictional candidate who was created by Clarence Kugler and his band of writers and performers for the play at our 18th week party, "This is your life, Candidate Smack." You'll see that there are some things going on in his life that each of us can relate to.

You may not have realized that Smack hailed from the deep South. When I've quoted him, I've tried – probably unsuccessfully – to replicate his accent. For you Southern folks, please realize that it was as difficult for me to do it as it is for you to hear it. For you Northerners – if you can't understand what Smack is saying, well, I'd say I did a good job.

Finally, I'd like to thank several of our classmates for their contributions, probably unknowingly, to "50th turns 80."

50th Turns 80

Joe Smack is acting peevish and he feels a little low,
He's been taking inventory since he hit the big 8-0.
It's a list of aches and troubles that beset him at this stage,
They should 'most all sound familiar to anyone his age.

His social life revolves around his medical appointments.
He hopes his tests and exam results won't leave him disappointed.
They ask if he has fallen and "Do you feel safe at home?"
You'd think that he's an ancient coot who can't be trusted on his own.

He's retired but he seems to have even less time on his hands
Since the time it takes to do anything continues to expand.
His ritual before bedtime is full of ointments, creams and meds
So he's even more exhausted by the time he goes to bed.

Pain in his back and knees and shoulders troubles him from time to time.
It's especially acute when up his long, steep stairs he climbs.
He still plays golf though his swing has gotten stiffer than before
And his voice is not so powerful when he tries to holler "fore."

Twice a week he goes to something called occupational therapy.
Since he has no occupation, he's stumped why that should be.
He faithfully does the exercises hoping they'll restore his youth
But just delaying getting worse is actually closer to the truth.

He's stubborn when he claims that those around him all are mumbling,
He refuses to admit that his poor hearing might be crumbling.
He can't read prescription labels with their teeny tiny print
And even with trifocals he has to get up close and squint.

It's very disconcerting when he sits down in a chair,
For those last few inches are a thrill as he free falls through the air.
Rising up again requires that he expend 'most all his strength,
And it takes a while before he reaches not quite his full length.

Getting in and out of cars demands the great Houdini's skills.
Hardly a day can pass that doesn't require a few Advils.
He used to cuss at old farts who were driving oh so slow,
But now that he is one of them, he ignores the horns that blow.

His stomach gives him troubles and his diet is restricted,
But just how many ways can one invent to fix a chicken?
His walk has got a shuffle and he pauses at a curb.
His nap each afternoon has a sign that says, "Do not disturb."

The young check-out clerk's cute smile boosts his ego that has sagged,
But down it goes when she sweetly asks, "Do you need help with your bags?"
Waitresses are condescending and call him things like "honey"
And he's shocked that eating out these days is costing so much money.

Technology is not Joe's friend and gets him all frustrated
When his kids buy him an iPhone that makes him feel outdated.
There's an app for this and an app for that of every type and class.
Well, as far as old Joe is concerned, they can blow apps out their...windows.

Loved ones used to give him sweaters, electronics and fancy things.
He tells them *"Don' git me any gifts, 'cause Ah a'ready have everthin."*
They're puzzled what could be of use for someone at this juncture.
They decide to give him gift cards for massage and acupuncture.

Then Joe pauses in his counting and ponders for a second,
 “Thars more to bein’ eighty than this list of cons, Ah reckon.
“Ah’ve bin given years that others were denied when they war young.
 “Ah’d be selfish to complain thet things ain’t pefect on this rung.”

“Achiev’n eighty’s an accomplishmint, a cause for celebration,
 Not a time for gloomy musin’s nor dark line of demarcation.
 It’s a notice to live each new day to its delahtful full extent,
 So when the evenin’ sun sets it was a day that was well-spent.”

“Ah’ve bin blessed to have a long lawf with love an joy an bliss.
 Ah shudn’t let maw troubles now detract from all of this.
 Reachin’ eighty and still pushin’ on takes a special sort of grit.
 And Ah know just when an’ where it was thet Ah acquired most of it.”

Then Joe drifts off for a moment that takes him back in time
 To fifty-seven years ago when he was in his prime.
 “Aw was lean an’ straight an’ youthful an’ was hawdened as a rock
 An’ some bits of stone are in me still with eighty years on my old clock.”

Joe thinks for a few seconds, and a smile flickers on his face.
Then he says to himself with no boasting (oh, maybe just a trace),
 “Aw’ve heard it said a hunert times, an’ so have ya’ll, Ah guess,
 ‘Ole age is not for sissies.’ Yeah, well, neither was OCS.”

Brian Walrath, on the left, and Clarence Kugler

