

The OLD MAN AND THE FLAG

I reckoned he was eighty
Or maybe eighty-five
He was standing at attention
A gnarled cane by his side.

A trembling hand he firmly placed
Cross his chest and o'er his heart
He watched the Flag go passing by
As he stood there, feet apart

To brace his withering body
Against the hostile wind
Seemed like he heard the whispering
Of an age-old battle hymn

I saw a teardrop forming
In the corner of his eye
It trickled slowly downward
As the old man breathed a sigh.

It was then he saw me watching him
And he noticed my old hat
He gently said You've lots to learn
Let's sit a spell and chat.

Did you see Old Glory passing by?
He ask me as we walked
Why sure I did, I answered
He said, Let's sit down here and talk.

That banner never has been shamed
From seventy- six til now
Do you know how you should honor it?
Did you ever learn just how?

Of did you just forget it
As so many more have done?
Do you think that we who fought for it
Were out there having fun?

I've seen her proudly flying, Son
O'er trenches near the Marne
And over Flanders Field she flies
Yet some don't give a darn.

She flies in cemeteries
Over graves of fallen heroes
Who made it possible for you and me
To speak of Hitlers and Neros.

We can talk about our government
Aloud for all to hear
Protest those things we're mad about
And do so without fear.

You should thank the Lord above you
You are free today, That's true
And you owe it all to those of us
Who fought, died , bled for you.

Remember Iwo Jima
And the beach of Normandy
The Arizona hallowed shrine
As she rests there in the sea.

You could be speaking German
Or maybe Japanese
And for those who fought for freedom
You should drop down on your knees.

You should thank the One who made you
For the blessings you've received
And don't forget to thank Him
For old war vets like me.

I thought of what the Old Man said
My face turned red I know
For suddenly it came to me
That what he said was so.

I hadn't realized before
The price that has been paid
To guarantee those freedoms
That I, enjoy today.

No longer will I scoff and sneer
When patriotic folk
With reverence salute that flag
That o'er me proudly floats

He changed my entire thinking
That wizened, aging man
And now I thank my Maker
That I am American

1982 Wayne T. Gise