

## **A visit to Cedar Lake Nursing Home, circa 1985**

*(adapted from an article I wrote for the Malakoff News... —we were doing Eden Alternative before it was a gleam in Dr. Thomas's eye. L. Humble)*

The large black dog resting in Cedar Lake Nursing Home's front yard doesn't notice the flock of cackling bantams passing her on their way to the front porch. A gentleman sitting on the porch warns the chickens they are going to catch it when Charlene finds them there. He welcomes you in, volunteering that this is a good place. Says he was in bad shape when he came and is now getting fat and sassy. White Doves are cooing in a big cage beside the front porch.

Inside the front room, more birds, and some fish. Hanging baskets of plants, stained glass, and antiques. A hearty old fellow beside the door hollers at you. He wants to know if it's cold enough for you. A lady has her quilt scraps spread out over three chairs. She likes company while she sews. In the dining room, more stained glass, checked tablecloths, about a dozen original oil paintings, good ones. Smells of bacon and sausage and biscuits linger from breakfast. A red-haired lady in a wheel chair is working a cross word puzzle and having another cup of coffee. A lady with a twinkle in her eye, also wheelchair bound, is teasing her favorite aide. A youngish looking woman in blue jeans and a pixie haircut walks by, whistling, with an armload of books and films. Two people call "Sue" at the same time. She assures one of them that Bingo will indeed be played if the creeks don't rise, and invites the other to come on down to her office to talk about it.

Then Charlene arrives. You can tell right off this is the boss, and guess that the bantams have already been properly and justly dealt with. She gets three hugs, two compliments, several teases, one complaint that the coffee is too strong, one complaint that the coffee is too weak, a request from the red-haired lady that the nursing home build a retreat house where you can go to get away from all the noise, a note to return three telephone calls, and a report that there had been a row at the domino table the night before. She returns the hugs, the compliments, the teases, and the telephone calls. She shows a resident the way to the bathroom, picks up someone's lap robe for them, tells the cook yes she can substitute pork chops for ham for tomorrow's lunch. She tells the domino rowdies they are going to have to tone it down or move their game outside.

Then she draws a cup of the disputed coffee and tries to think how she is going to fix *that*.

The noise level is a little loud. People on their way to the whirlpool, people being helped to walk, people cleaning rooms, people giving pills and taking pulses, are talking to one another, sharing stories, and their lives. Sixty people live here. About forty five work here. Most of them would tell you this is a close to home as a nursing home can get.....