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For my Father on the Occasion of his Retirement

You liked to tell people that you worked in a factory.

Mother hated it because it made it sound like you turned wheels on a cog in an assembly line.

You didn't. You were an engineer, or a technician, we didn't quite understand what you did. You made tubes that went into radar to make them work.

You pressed buttons on boxes and sometimes things blew up.

We could never be allowed into the building where you worked because everyone had to have a security clearance.

Your father told you that if you screwed up you would go to jail where the community college is now. You never went to jail.

You worked at your job for forty years. You would have made your father proud to know that you never ended up in the big house.

Your father didn't have a job for 12 years during the Depression; that killed him. He didn't have enough to support his family.

They scraped by on welfare. They ate what they could.

When he got a job in the Navy Yard, they bought a house and my aunt told me they thought it was a mansion.

All of you slept three to a bed.

In our house, we always had our own room.

When you drove me home from work

you liked to tell me that you were counting

the days until you retired. I asked you once if you hated your job and you said you didn't, you liked it.

You went to work to support us through the ebb and flow of the tides:

sickness, psychosis,

diarrhea, heart attack,

isolation, disenchantment,

failure, success,

snow, rain,

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peanut butter and jelly, chicken Santa Fe,
and every catastrophe that would fit between two slices of bread.

We had food on the table and a roof over our heads.

To live, to be alive, not just scrape by. To be nourished enough.
That is what you gave us.

Thank you.