

# Failure to Thrive

Category: Poems

written by Daniel Becker | May 22, 2009

My matched set of nonagenarians

is almost two hundred years old  
and nearing escape velocity.  
They are failing to thrive with a vengeance.

They have outlived everyone  
except the powers of attorney  
for whom they are a source of consternation.

Their constipation is prune-proof.  
They scratch where it itches till it bleeds  
and call on me to staunch the bleeding.

They can't recall our earnest conversations.  
Adult Protective Services  
elicits

their indignation reflex. They ready, aim  
and fire  
their walkers at the social worker.

Pride goes before their falls.  
They hoard.  
In their home every room is attic.

Neither odor nor order matters.  
Thank goodness you're here they say  
and then berate me.

It's true.  
I don't know what to do.  
I meet the lawyer at the bedside.

I meet the notary at the bedside.  
We arrange for the funeral home  
to call me at home.

By the end their ashes plus the urn  
will weigh more than they did.  
The wind always knows what to do.

## **About the poet:**

Daniel Becker practices and teaches general internal medicine and palliative care at the University of Virginia School of Medicine where he also edits the on-line journal [Hospital Drive](#). In August he teaches at the [Taos Writing](#)

[Retreat for Health Professionals.](#)

**About the poem:**

“This poem includes bits and pieces of a few thousand years of nonagenarians who have stubbornly and gleefully taught me what is best for them. I’d like to dedicate it to them and to the future nonagenarians now gracing my waiting room.”

**Poetry editors:**

Judy Schaefer and Johanna Shapiro