

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 10

JANUARY – MARCH, 2008

This is the tenth edition of my diary-type journal in which I write about whatever is on my mind. Only God knows what these 3 months will hold. Maybe God's trumpet will sound before this quarter ends! Wouldn't that be great? Come, Lord Jesus!

Tuesday, January 15, 2008. As my typing gets progressively slower and more difficult, I've been thinking about a toy typewriter I had in childhood. Instead of a keyboard, it had a wheel in that spot with the letters written around the edge. I don't remember exactly how it worked, but I know I had to rotate the wheel until the letter I wanted to print was in the correct position. Then I pressed the wheel downward and – like magic! – that letter was imprinted on the inserted paper. You can imagine how long it took to print a sentence! But I appreciated my toy and used it until I went on to other interests.

Now as I sit before my computer keyboard, my left hand moving across the entire expanse until a finger is poised above the right letter, I see myself turning the wheel that is superimposed on the keys. When the wheel and my finger are aligned, I press down and – like magic! – a letter appears on my computer screen and another writing moves on toward completion. I'm thankful that I can still type at all! What does my right hand do? It operates the shift bar, the directional arrows, and occasionally stretches far enough to delete.

Sunday, January 20, 2008. Very early this morning my night aide came into my room to give me the routine care that I needed. Her work accomplished, she was about to turn out the light when she foresaw a problem: How would she find her way out of my room in the dark? Looking around, she discovered a solution. "Oh," she said, "I'll follow that strip of light shining under your door from the hall lights." And she did.

As she was wending her way toward the door, my mind transported me back in time and space to Tucson, Arizona in 1956. I had been in Arizona a couple months when an elderly widow from my church invited me to have dinner with her one Sunday afternoon. I was happy for the opportunity to get to know her better. She and her husband had been missionaries who, upon retirement, moved to Tucson. Now she lived alone in the house they had shared until his death.

One of her stories was absolutely thrilling to me. After she was alone, she awoke one night to find the house full of smoke. In the thick darkness, she became disoriented. Where was her bedroom door? Would she get out of the house in time? Just then she saw a spot of light on the floor. She headed toward it, and when she was almost there, the light moved. Again she followed it and again it moved until she arrived at the front door and safety! Of course she believed that the Lord was the one who had guided her out of the house, and so did I. What an awesome story!

Since I had no car in Arizona, an elder from our church came at a specified time to take me home. This man was also a retired missionary, as well as a gifted Bible teacher. On the way home, he asked, "Did she tell you her story about the fire?" With a snicker in his voice, he continued: "She actually believes a light guided her out of the house!" I was stunned, and saddened. Not all of God's people believe that God interacts with his people today just as he did in Bible times. I do. Do you?

Saturday, January 26, 2008. I will start this entry with a bit of humor. An aide noticed my feeding tube peeking out from under my shirt. "Look!" she said. "Your intestines are showing!" I thought that was so funny! Now I have one more thing I can recall when I need a chuckle.

On a more serious note, my LightWriter suddenly stopped writing on Sunday, right in the middle of a weekend holiday visit from the Dyers. Charles checked the message on the machine with the manual and found that my unit needed a new battery that only the ALS society, owners of my machine, could supply and install. He phoned the society and found they were closed weekends and holidays. I used the computer screen to talk with the Dyers and others for a couple days. I also wrote and printed a note, in case I had to explain my situation to anyone.

As I wrote the note, I had another "Flashback", as in my essay by that name. This time I was at Millersville State Teachers' College and, as happened several times a year, I woke up in my dormitory room only to find that my voice was gone. If I didn't feel other-wise sick, I would assume my laryngitis was due to allergies and was not contagious. So I would go to class, hand the teacher a note that said, "Please don't call on me today. I have laryngitis." and take my seat. The teachers always honored my request.

Marty phoned the ALS number on Tuesday and by Wednesday afternoon she brought me a loaner LightWriter they had sent for me to use while mine is being repaired. What excellent service!

Sunday, February 10, 2008. This week contained so many evidences that I am in the place and condition that God has assigned to me for this time. The kingdom of God is advancing not only at Sky View, but for miles around us. I am so privileged to be part of the action! A staff member had a life-changing encounter with Jesus recently and makes no secret of the fact that she's being baptized at the end of this month. My room continues to be the scene of intense moments of worship, including this morning. And the worship services that we have here on the first Thursday of the month are now being held elsewhere by others, namely Sister Jane, a visiting nun whom I first met at Drum Hill, and Vallie Turner. Now Cliff Cullum is coming up with new ideas along the same lines. All glory to God!

I believe in the healing power of laughter. I know I am more relaxed when I have an aide who can laugh at mistakes and misunderstandings caused by my inability to talk. Today I had an aide who did not know my morning routine. Wisely, she went to get help. There is on our floor an experienced aide named Nadine who seems to show up just when you need her and is always glad to help. How happy I was when she came to assist my aide! Together, they got me out of bed with the lift and moved me into the bathroom and onto the toilet. After giving further instructions, Nadine left to take care of her own assignment.

My aide got me washed; dressed; and into my chair, using the lift. Then she seemed to think her work with me was over! Before I realized what was happening, she pushed the equipment out of the room and was gone. I didn't even have my LightWriter on my lap! Rather than try to pursue her, I decided to see if I could find Nadine. True to form, she was in the hallway near my door! At once she noticed that my LightWriter was missing and went to get it. Recalling the other things I needed, I typed to her this message: I need you for 3 minutes when you can. She said OK, and I went into my room to wait. She didn't come as soon as I had expected, so I went to my computer and made a list of the things I wanted her to do for me. That was not an easy task, since I didn't have my glasses on!

During the hour I waited while she hurried to finish her work, three times she called in to me, "I'm coming! I haven't forgotten!" And then she arrived. She closed the door behind her (an action I thought unusual), sat on the edge of my bed, clasped her hands and smiled, as if to say, "My next 3 minutes are all yours!" So I drove over to the computer, activated the screen so that the list showed, and moved out of the way for her. Here is what she read (with typos such as "gkasses" and "wures" corrected!):

Pull shirt down in back & fix in front

Glasses

Remote

Put bell on bed in my reach

Check back of right shoe. Feels uncomfortable.

Push back wires on floor under desk.

Open all shades.

Feet on platform.

THANKS FOR ALL YOUR HELP TODAY!

When she was halfway through the list, Nadine began to laugh. Then GALES of laughter erupted from deep inside, swirling over her attempts to explain. "Oh! You had JOBS you wanted me to do for you!" I nodded, completely puzzled. "I thought you wanted to TALK to me! I told the other aides, 'Verna wants to talk with me for 3 minutes. I wonder what she wants to say to me?' I finished my work and closed the door so we could have privacy – oh, I must tell my husband about this!" Of course, by then my laughter was freely mingling with hers.

Nadine gladly took care of everything on the list. Then she said something that gave new meaning to the whole incident. It seems she had been in a low state of mind all day. She needed something to elevate her mood, and the laughter did it! She was rejuvenated, and it was beautiful to see. That wouldn't have happened if I could speak. Doesn't God do everything well?!

Thursday, February 14, 2008. Yesterday, when I finished typing the above entry, I printed a copy for Nadine. Today she was assigned to be my aide for her shift. To my recollection, this was only the second time that happened in the more than two years I've been here! She loved the story and was glad she could have it to show her husband. Then she told me briefly what was troubling her on Sunday. Earlier that day someone had listened to her story and prayed for her, she said. That was the start of her healing. The hearty, sustained laughter that she had in my room completed the treatment she needed to restore her good mood. Her one request was that I put her name, which I had not revealed, into the story. That has now been accomplished. Thank you, Nadine!

Sunday, February 25, 2008. We had a snow crisis a couple days ago. The well-predicted storm began shortly after midnight on Friday and lasted through most of the daylight hours. About 10 inches of snow accumulated in our area, the most of any storm this winter. Until I moved into Sky View, I didn't realize how traumatic winter storms are for institutions such as ours. We MUST have at least a minimal number of nurses and aides on each floor. Many night shift workers ended up staying for the next shift, aided by a few people who risked their lives to

come to work. I had wondered if I might have to spend the day in bed, but no! Two aides came in to work together at getting me up. I knew better than to ask for a shower, although Friday is one of my shower days. As tired as the staff was, I sensed a spirit of adventure among us as the day went on. I kept looking out the window. Marty, who LOVES snow, had emailed this message to me: "Isn't it 'purty'?!" (She brought my mother into our conversation with the unusual spelling of the word "pretty".) Oh yes, Marty! It really was "purty"!

Friday, February 29, 2008. I wanted to type this date because I don't often get the chance to do so! Happy birthday to my friend Connie and to Donald, the son my friend Betty gave birth to on 2/29/64. Six days later I gave birth to my daughter Marty, so Betty and I had a lot in common back then!

Tuesday, March 4, 2008. Some time between 10 and 11 PM on Sunday, March 2, Elie died. Elie, a resident of the fourth floor, is the poet I told you about in an earlier issue of my Penny journals. Her death was sudden; she had been out at her daughter's house that day. I asked how she died and was told she aspirated and then choked. How well I understood! It is highly likely that I could die the same way, that or from pneumonia. Or maybe God has an entirely different plan in mind for taking me Home when it's my time to go! Marty brought me Elie's obituary from our local newspaper. It said, in part: " 'It's not how much you love others but how much you are loved by others,' and Elie was certainly loved by others. Retired special education teacher, life-long political activist, two-time cancer survivor, and living with Parkinson's for over 30 years, Elie always saw the good in others." That was true even at Sky View!

As I was writing the above, a poem began formulating in my head, and with it I will close this entry.

IN MEMORY OF ELIE

By Verna Kwiatkowski

I moved to Sky View on December 29, 2005.
Of all the happy memories that I have kept alive,
The way that I met Elie is on the top of the list
Of experiences that should not be missed.

What a welcome she gave me when I arrived on 4th floor!
She wheeled up beside me as I sat by my door
And said, "My name is Elie and I want to be your friend."
And we did become friends, right up to the end.

We had much in common, including the urge to write.
And both of us were hindered by things we had to fight,
Like diseases that made our bodies difficult to control
While leaving our minds untouched, with ideas on a roll.

Elie could toss off a poem as quickly as you could wink.
It seems she didn't need to take much time to think!
The words just flowed so freely out of her fertile mind
Forming thoughts that were so beautiful, positive and kind.

I'll remember Elie as a woman with a ready smile
Who made each passing of her chair worthwhile
By freely giving compliments that brightened up our day.
Her memory will linger, though she has gone away.

Elie was so modest; she would blush if she could hear
The kind things we are saying, things that made her dear.
But now she's in a different realm. Other rules apply:
No blushing, pain or dying in her Home with God on high!

March 4 – 6, 2008

Saturday, March 15, 2008. Remember the word games I presented in Penny 9? MaryBeth wrote that she found two more words: “waning” from Washington and “severe” from New Year’s Eve. Thank you, MaryBeth!

Then recently Marty sent me a cryptoquote she had solved and liked: “Never cherish the worries that you meet each day, for the better you treat them, the longer they stay. – Source obscure” Good advice! I would have been able to solve that one too, back in the days when I could hold a pencil and write, for I had learned to recognize ‘Source obscure,’ no matter what letters the puzzle makers used to try to disguise it.

Last Sunday we had a different word game for our activity – Hangman! Remember that game? I did well in that game and really enjoyed it. Have I told you that we get points for playing games at Sky View? Then several times a year tables are spread with merchandise marked with numbers indicating how many points it would take to ‘buy’ the items. We look forward to shopping day! So far I have found few things that I can use myself, so I shop instead for the Christmas Child shoebox project sponsored by Samaritan’s Purse.

Sunday, March 16, 2008. On February 10 I wrote about people having new ideas for our worship services. Since then two “speaking” engagements have been set up for me! The first is on Tuesday morning, April 8 and was planned by Vallie Turner. She leads a Praise Fellowship group that has an outreach meeting once a month in a room they rent from the United Methodist Church in Shrub Oak (UMCSO). It was to this group that I spoke the last time I used my own voice. This time Cliff Cullum will be my voice, reading what I have written. Carolyn Burke will make the travel arrangements and go with me on the trip.

The second engagement is scheduled for Sunday, April 13 at 6 PM, also at UMCSO. The church has a Praise Service in the evening once a month, and Cliff got the idea of using a Sky View service at one of them. He wants me to be there, if possible. And again, he will be my voice. This means I will be very busy from now until April 14. Next Sunday George and his family are going to give an Easter service here (I don’t have to do anything but attend), and then our own program will be on April 3! In addition, I am trying hard to finish an essay called “Across the Generations”. I had no idea living in a nursing home could be like this!

Saturday, March 22, 2008. This past week, much to my delight, I did complete the essay “Across the Generations”! I also planned the program for April 3, and Cliff offered to put together, from what I have already written, the program for April 13! That should free me to do

some of the creative works that I am eager to write – Lord willing, that is. Daily I live with the reality that this day may be my last on earth, and by that I mean more than the thought that none of us knows what a day may bring. My general stamina seems to be waning. Perhaps that is temporary; we'll see!

Sunday, March 23, 2008. Today is Easter! It seems strange to have the holiday so early in the year, but I didn't realize how unusual it was until I received a letter with Easter greetings from Dr. Gordon Anderson, pastor of the church Leo attends. I'll try to have someone type the information it contained into this issue of Penny; you may find it as interesting as I did.

Meanwhile, we had a wonderful Easter service here at Sky View at 2:00 today. During the service I felt like I was in church, a good feeling for me. Oh, how easy it was for me to count my blessings! I sat between Janet and Marty, facing George, who moderated the meeting, and watched as Leo, Eric, Evan and Andrew all participated in various ways. What love! For the sermon, George took my essay "Resurrection – Changed!" (which, he said, would take 45 minutes to read) and masterfully pared it down to the size he wanted. I was so impressed! Honing a service out of materials already written can be just as creative as writing the material in the first place.

Sunday, March 30, 2008. Had a wonderful visit yesterday with my son Dave from North Carolina. He brought with him his daughter Amy (15) and her friend Cara. They also brought a copy of the recent movie "August Rush" so we could watch it together. Dave warned me that I might cry at the end, but they would be good tears. I hope he explained to Amy and Cara that my crying is abnormal and noisy, for that it was!

Here is the Easter information I mentioned on March 23. Janet dictated the information and George typed it. Thanks!

"This year is the earliest Easter any of us will EVER see! And only the most elderly of our population (95 years or older) have ever seen it this early before. And none of us have ever, or will ever, see it a day earlier! The next time Easter will be this early (March 23) will be the year 2228 (220 years from now). The last time it was this early was in 1913. In addition, the next time it will be a day earlier (March 22) will be in the year 2285 (277 years from now). The last time it was on March 22 was 1818. SO, no one alive today has or will ever see it any earlier than this year!"

With this I will close another issue of my Penny journals. As I said, I have some busy weeks coming up. I'm anxious to see how I do physically and emotionally during those weeks. Pray for me!