

## A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 13

OCTOBER – DECEMBER, 2008

**Monday, October 13, 2008.** At the end of last month, after I had finished writing the service for October, I embarked on a fascinating project that is bringing me much joy. I realized that the essays I began writing more than 4 years ago, intending to explore the subjects of ageing and dying, now included many that had little or nothing to do with either topic. I also realized that I had written and collected enough material to form a whole book on ageing, dying, and Heaven! (I could not omit the third subject, as Heaven informs my thinking about the other two.)

So far I have

- chosen a title: Heavenly Thoughts on Ageing and Dying;
- begun the process of re-formatting and editing my early essays;
- begun the process of sorting out and organizing my materials; and
- written a preface for the book.

I expect to finish the book this month, Lord willing.

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The elevators at Sky View are in the process of being upgraded. The practical effect for us is that only one elevator of the two is operating on a given day. What a difference this makes! It is not unusual to have to wait a half hour or more for a ride. This affects attendance at the programs held in the common rooms on the first floor. We delayed the start of our service on October 2, at the request of Casey, the Activities Director. Earl Brown, our pianist, gladly extended his prelude for our listening pleasure. Noticeably absent from our team that day was Frank Hetzer, who was having extensive heart surgery as we met. One week later he was home and is doing well.

**Tuesday, October 14, 2008.** My daughter Marty and her husband Ed Ford have a house in the Adirondacks, about 4 hours north of their home in Yorktown. On October 4 I received an email from Marty titled “News from the North Country.” The message consisted of only one sentence and I enjoyed it as much as she knew I would. It said: “Someone has placed a most amazing patchwork quilt over the mountains!” And now, as I look out of my Sky View window, I can see that the same blanket is being spread over our hills as well! It is a treat for the eyes! Thank you, Lord!

**Thursday, October 16, 2008.** Guess what? Our elevators are both in operation, a couple weeks ahead of the predicted completion date! I am so glad!

**Sunday, October 26, 2008.** The project of making a book out of my many essays continues to move forward and remains enjoyable, but it is taking more time than I had expected. Now I hope to have it done by Thanksgiving!

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Earlier this month I got a letter from Joan Fasnacht, wife of my cousin Galen. She opened by saying, “Galen went home to the Lord on September 26.” Isn’t that a wonderful way to describe the death of a believing person? Galen was the older of two boys born to my father’s sister Clara and her husband Walter. Just 1 year younger than I, Galen and I would sometimes get to play together on Sunday afternoons when both our families chose the same time to visit Grandma and Grandpa

Ziegler on their small farm. Their house had a feature that had both of us intrigued: wooden cellar doors in the back of the house that looked to us like sliding boards! We must have tried them out, for I remember both of us had been warned NOT to slide down the cellar doors; they were OFF LIMITS!

Then came a warm summer Sunday, when we were perhaps 7 and 6, that the cellar doors drew us to them like magnets. Our parents and grandparents were all in the living room at the other end of the house. They couldn't see us, and we would never tell. Let's do it! And so Galen perched himself at the top of one side of the doors and I on the other. At a given signal, down we went!

But our parents DID find out, for on that slide the seat of Galen's pants were torn and I got a large splinter in my bottom! A visit to the doctor was required to get that splinter out. The cellar doors lost their allure that day and I was left with a story that would forever link me with my cousin – that and a good illustration of temptation, sin, and its consequences, even in the life of a child!

**Wednesday, October 29, 2008.** Our nurse manager came into my room this morning while I was still in bed and asked if I wanted a flu shot. I nodded, and in less than a minute, I was immunized! I am thankful for services like that, routinely given by the Sky View staff.

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What an interesting dream I had last night! It was complicated, or perhaps it was several dreams that I recall as one. Included were eating in a small restaurant, where I left my pocketbook and went later to retrieve it; driving on the highways and getting lost on the roads of a city; shopping in a department store and having a frightening "adventure" there on a broken stairway; and being in several church services, sometimes sitting in the congregation and sometimes taking part in the program. But it was the ending that I want to tell in more detail. First this: almost all of my dreams, due to my physical condition, include bathroom scenes; this one was no exception.

Between services in a large church building, several women joined me in heading down the stairs to the ladies' room. The bathroom, strictly functional with sinks lining one wall and stalls the other, was already filled with females of all ages when we arrived. Finally a stall became available; I went in and sat down. Almost immediately we were urged to vacate the building, as a violent fire had broken out and was quickly heading toward the bathroom. But I was not ready to get up yet! While I was wondering what to do, the floor under the toilets collapsed so that I was tipped backwards. The stall door also flew open. Now I was really trapped! There was only one thing to do: scream for help. As I did so, another woman also called for help. TWO of us were trapped in the room!

Just then the door into the bathroom opened and in came a smiling young man who had an orange glow emanating from the outlines of his body. He quickly rescued the other woman and then reached for me. I was amazed at how easily I lifted up once he touched my hand! He guided us through a door that led us outside, where perhaps 20 people had gathered at the edge of a grove of trees. I noticed that all these people were wearing basic brown outfits that were beautifully decorated with multicolored beads, or maybe gems, especially in the chest area of the garments. And each had that same orange glow flickering from their bodies. Everyone looked physically fit and very happy. Some were dancing; others were standing around, observing, smiling.

There were two people that I knew. One of them caught my eye and smiled broadly in recognition. The other was vigorously dancing, as if doing the twist. I glanced at her feet and noticed that they were not touching the ground; rather, she was dancing on the glow that swirled under her feet. Especially noticeable was her wide, open-mouthed smile. She looked like Joy personified as she continued to rhythmically move her whole body, her long hair and bangs bouncing with each move. It was then that I realized the other rescued woman and I were dressed in the same garments as the

rest of the people in the grove, including the glow. Finally the truth dawned on me: all of us had died in the fire, including our rescuer!

With that realization, I awoke. The story continues to warm my spirit every time I think of it. What a picture of death being swallowed up in victory!

**Friday, October 31, 2008.** I just returned upstairs after attending our Halloween parade on the first floor. Many staff members, residents, some children, and even a few dogs appeared in costume. I like to see all the creativity that goes into some of the outfits. Also, I like to mingle with the residents on a fairly regular basis. After all, I AM one of them!

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Yesterday I took a Paratransit trip to visit my friends in Drum Hill. My friend Carolyn Burke, who made the arrangements, went with me. What a beautiful day it was to take a ride! Leo met us at the door. 34 months after I moved away, and nearly 11 months since my last visit, there were still quite a few residents and staff members who were very glad to see me, and vice versa. That shows the power of God's eternal love!

**Friday, November 7, 2008.** Yesterday we had our November service here at Sky View. Frank was still absent, though he is recovering well from his heart surgery. Harvey, a retired man who is a friend of our son George, has been attending the services fairly regularly. Yesterday he became a part of the worship team, reading a Scripture duet with Leo and a trio with Leo and Barbara. We also welcomed Loretta to our team. She was sent to us by Earl, our pianist, as his schedule was too full for him to be with us this month. Cliff served as moderator, George and Vallie worked with the residents, and the Holy Spirit bound us together as one for the glory of God. What a pleasure!

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This morning Laura, my physical therapist, came into my room, as she does 3 times a week, to give me the passive resistance workout that has been prescribed for me by Sky View. As she moves my arms, legs, and fingers, it's amazing how often my thoughts go back to childhood scenes when my physical condition was far different from what it is today.

In the first scene, I am perhaps 11 years old. Mom and I and some visitors are gathered in the living room of our house on S. Lancaster St., Annville, PA. During a lull in the conversation, Mom asks me to show everybody how double-jointed I am. Glad to comply, I get on my knees by the piano bench and then lie back until my shoulders and head are flat on the floor. Our visitors are impressed and agree with Mom that I certainly am double-jointed! I smile as I get up from the floor. I am still smiling, though I learned long ago that there was nothing unusual about my joints!

In the other scene, I am sitting at my desk in high school when I decide to exercise my fingers. With my right hand I press on the 4 fingers of my left hand until they lie flat against the back of my hand. Then I do the same with my right hand fingers. It's easy! Finally, I press the palms of my hands together and then see how far back I can bend my fingers using only the muscles in my hands, no force of any kind allowed. I am pleased with the size of the angle made by my back-stretched fingers! Yes, they were certainly limber.

I have no regrets as I recount stories such as these. Our children used to have a book in which the phrase "That was then; this is now" was repeatedly used. What I have described was Then. Now I can barely get my palms together! What pleases me is that I can enjoy both Then AND Now. I do not mourn the abilities I have lost; nor have I repressed the memories of what used to be. I'm glad!

**Monday, November 24, 2008.** Frank came to see me today! He is recovering well from his heart surgery and expects to be with us for the service next week. What impresses me the most is his wonderful attitude toward the things he went through. Obviously in awe, he mentioned how many people had prayed for him from all parts of the country. Rather than attributing the success of his operation to the number or the strength of the prayers, Frank has a different outlook. "Just think," he said, "because of my heart trouble, many people had a reason to talk with God, some of whom probably hadn't talked with God in years. What a privilege to be able to connect people to God this way!"

**Tuesday, November 25, 2008.** The book I am assembling will not be finished by Thanksgiving, but it is nearing completion. What matters to me is that the project continues to be interesting. My daughter Marty has spent many hours editing my writings, working both at home and here on my computer. She has also made a number of trips to Staples, choosing a 3-ring binder and having papers duplicated.

For me, the most fun has come from finding things from the past or writing new items to add to my collection of essays, making it more of a hearty stew or a beautiful patchwork quilt, as I explain in the first essay, "In Its Time." I really do like variety!

**Thursday, November 27, 2008.** This is not only Thanksgiving Day, but also the 78th anniversary of my parents' wedding day. They were married on Thanksgiving, and whenever the two celebrations coincided, the day seemed extra special to me.

This year, for the first time since I entered Sky View, I had Thanksgiving decorations in my room. My friends Joe and Lillian brought me a pumpkin when they came to visit a few weeks ago. Then Marty found in her attic a turkey she had made years ago from a pinecone, pipe cleaners, tiny wiggly eyes, and construction paper. She said she taught the girls at The Community Church of Yorktown how to make them when I served as pastor there. The crafted turkeys served as centerpieces at our church's fall fellowship dinner that year! Marty played an important role in the church during my whole pastorate, and I appreciated that. Anyway – the pumpkin and the turkey, side by side, brightened my room all this month and brought me joy.

My daughter MaryBeth and family arrived from Hamilton, MA this morning to celebrate the holiday with us. In the late afternoon they came to see me. Nine-year-old Graham recently had a school project in which the children explored their ancestry. MaryBeth said that when he had to describe me, he wrote, "Grandma can't eat anymore, but she is still thankful." Then MaryBeth said Graham had a question he wanted to ask me in person. He stood in front of me and asked, "ARE you thankful?" I knew immediately that this was a legacy moment, something he was likely to remember all his life. I thought for a few seconds and then decided to give the simplest, honest answer I could. "Yes," I typed. Graham read my answer and smiled. I smiled too!

**Thursday, December 4, 2008.** What a day this has been! It began with my annual Sky View conference, included some book editing as well as this month's Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends, and concluded with another chapter in Mystery Shoes: a story I have not told you yet, but will – in a minute. (Yes, I was thinking of the old Damon Runyon radio shows when I ended that sentence!)

I must admit I was a little flustered when I found out four days ago that my annual meeting was to be held on the morning of our service. I try to be well rested at the services, and could imagine all sorts of stressful scenarios taking place with the two events on one day. I decided to go with Marty's

availability, since she was to attend with me. She was available. I knew I would have to draw on God's grace and strength, and in the end, accepted the challenge.

That was Sunday. On Monday I got an email from Cliff telling me that he was ill and would not be at the service. I gladly accepted his offer to prepare the handout sheet for us. How I appreciate the depth of the team God has assembled to present our programs! This time I asked Leo if he would take Cliff's place, and he said yes. By Tuesday evening all changes and details had been worked out, leaving Wednesday free to get myself ready for the annual meeting. My main tasks were to notify the staff that I needed to get up much earlier than usual the next morning and to write a list of questions and concerns that I wanted to address with the leadership. I did both.

This morning all went very well concerning getting up early. All the stressful scenarios that I mentioned turned out to be some of the "vain imaginings" against which we are warned in the Bible. I was dressed and in my chair before Marty came to be briefed about my questions and to work on my book. Without rushing at all, we arrived in plenty of time for the meeting, which was both pleasant and productive. I had both processed the meeting and rested before it was time to go downstairs for the service. All went well there, too, although some of our participants had trouble finding parking spaces and hurried in at the last minute! Afterward, I was no more tired than usual, and for that I give glory to God. Leo went with me back to my room, and that brings me to the story of the:

### MYSTERY SHOES

In my girlhood, I had a book by Grace Livingston Hill titled Mystery Flowers. I loved that book, and read it several times. The entire plot revolved around answering some simple questions: Who was leaving flowers in places where the heroine would find them? And why? Now some shoes have mysteriously shown up in my room, bringing with them a host of questions.

It all began last Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, when Uri, manager of the housekeeping department, came into my room carrying a plastic bag filled with items and said, "We have labeled your new shoes. Where do you want me to put them?" Shaking my head, I backed away from the computer, faced him, and typed on my Lightwriter, "Those are not my shoes." "That's not your name?" he asked, pointing to a handprinted label on the bag. "That's my name and my room number," I said, "but those are not my shoes." Then I thought of a way to prove my point. "What size are they?" I asked. Was I surprised when the shoes turned out to be exactly my size! But they were not my style. For almost 6 years I have worn nothing but sturdy leather sneaker-type shoes. These were two different kinds of sandals, with open toes and heels.

"Shall I leave them here?" Uri asked, pointing to my table. I shook my head. "Take them with you," I said, "so that if someone inquires about their missing shoes, you can give them to their rightful owner." As soon as he left, I went to my MailBug and sent this message to both Marty and Janet: "??Did either of you give me a gift of shoes??" Obviously having conferred, they both replied with: "Not!!" I smiled at their reference to the story of the "Little Red Hen." What fun!

Over the weekend I thought a lot about the shoes. What if someone WERE trying to give me a gift, even anonymously, would I want to refuse it? But then, I wasn't really refusing it; I just wanted to be sure it got to the right person. I began to wonder if someone had read my essay "Shoes" and was responding to it by sending me this gift. I actually scanned the essay to see if I had mentioned my shoe size in it. I hadn't. The decision I made was that on Monday I would go to Uri's office and bring the shoes to my room, still awaiting a possible claim on them from someone else.

It was actually Tuesday before I went downstairs to talk with Uri. Nobody had asked about the shoes, but they were not in his office, either. He said on Wednesday he'd ask another employee where the shoes had been stored and then bring them to me. When they did not appear the next

day, I prepared myself for the possibility that they were gone. And then when Leo and I entered my room after the service today, there on my table was the gift, plastic bag, label and all!

**Friday, December 5, 2008.** This morning a member of the housekeeping staff came into my room, smiling broadly, and asked if I had my shoes. He was so pleased when I nodded yes. "We found them yesterday," he said. MY SHOES, he called them. I guess that's what they are! The label really leaves no question about that.

I realize that the giver may be reading this journal entry. If you included a card with your gift, please know that it got lost in the shuffle; then tell me who you are so I can properly thank you. If you want to remain anonymous, that's OK. Consider yourself thanked!

**Thursday, December 11, 2008.** The prototype of my book Heavenly Thoughts on Ageing and Dying has been completed! For the past several days Marty and I have been getting some of them in the mail and others ready to be given as gifts. We only made 20 copies, intending to give ourselves time to make changes before going into wider production. I can see why authors sometimes do not read their own books; there are always editorial changes that could be made if you look hard enough. After I scan the rest of the essays I have already written to see if anything belongs in this book, after we consider any comments we may get from our first readers, and after the few alterations already in my mind have been handled, I believe I will be able to walk away from it and say, "There! That's done!" and move on. I've already done that successfully with my first book: Words of Encouragement.

What about my writings that did not have to do with ageing, dying or Heaven? I saw them all falling into one of two categories, hence 2 more books:

1. When I Was a Child. This would contain things I wrote in my childhood, as well as essays I have written more recently that are rooted in my childhood, or are about my birth family or my hometown.
2. A Colorful Patchwork Quilt. This would contain general essays that may seem as unrelated as the patches on a quilt, but if you look closely enough, hopefully you will see that God and my life as God's child bind the patches together in a way that will be useful, warm-hearted, and even beautiful.

As eager as I am to start on these projects, I plan to pace myself so the work is also fun AND I want to give Marty all the time she needs to rest from her labors! I'll keep you posted.

**Sunday, December 14, 2008.** My friend John, who lives across the hall and down one room from me, has been experiencing a drastic decline in health these past few weeks. His birthday was the day before Thanksgiving. When I went to give him congratulations, he said he had expected to die before then. "Everything is an effort with a capital E," he said. I nodded. Then he added, "It's all in God's hands." Again I nodded.

Yesterday I was on my way to get help for John when I saw his family coming down the hall, led by John's son and his wife. "Hello, Verna," he said with a smile. And then he made introductions. "This is John's friend," he said to the family. And then, pointing to the four beautiful, vibrant young women with them, said, "And these are John's granddaughters." John is very proud of his whole family, with good reason, and talks about them often. He is also a great storyteller. I feel privileged whenever I am on the listening end of his stories.

**Friday, December 19, 2008.** Today we had our first heavy snowfall of the season – at least 8". This afternoon I drove out of my room into the elevator alcove to socialize for a while. Various kinds of wheelchairs lined one wall, each supporting a resident that I knew. I smiled and waved at them all. Down at the end of the line I heard Schatzie (one of the newer residents of 4th floor) ask Alice (who was on the 4th floor when I arrived) why I don't say anything. "Because she can't talk," Alice answered, and then added, "We have it easy, because we can talk." I was thrilled to hear that my infirmity was causing Alice to accept her own. Now there's a reason for mingling!

I drove past the women and sat looking out the window at the beautiful wintry scene. "Isn't it pretty?" I typed on my Lightwriter, and then positioned my chair so that Alice could read my screen. (She and I have had good conversations before.) After she commented, I moved my chair so Schatzie could read the same screen. In the lively 3-way conversation that followed, Schatzie proved to be adept at responding to my Lightwriter. Now I have someone else to talk with!

**Saturday, December 20, 2008.** Betty, my usual aide from 7 - 3, came to see me early this morning. Full of compassion, she stood by my bedside and gently said, "We lost a good friend, didn't we?" I indicated that I hadn't heard any news, but wanted to know. Betty hesitated a moment and then said, "John Kissane died last night about 11:00." He, of course, is the friend that I wrote about last Sunday. My mind flooded with memories, some of them bringing tears of gratitude. Betty understood; what a comfort she was to me!

My last conversation with John was on Thursday afternoon. He had been spending more and more time in his room, but that time he was in the alcove in a place that was accessible to me. He waved and smiled as I approached, looking far healthier and more energetic than I had seen him for a long time. We had a happy chat. I thanked him for the sports articles he had torn from the newspaper and sent to me via various aides and nurses, remembering the Effort it took him to do that. I told him about meeting his family in the hallway, and so it went until my nurse told me to return to my room for medications.

I said goodbye, turned around my chair, and headed down the hall when I heard him call out, "Goodbye, Mrs. Bloom!" I turned my head and saw him happily smiling and waving from his chair. I was too far away to reply with my Lightwriter, so I just smiled and waved back. John knew that within myself I was saying, "Goodbye, Jake!" More than two years have passed since John told me about an old TV show in which the secondary characters, Jake and Mrs. Bloom were neighbors. From time to time after that, we used those names as if we, too, were actors in a play. It was fun! Only this time John was using our acting to say his final goodbye to me. What a tremendous gift to leave me! Thank you, John.

Another playful way we used to say goodbye was by using phrases in vogue perhaps 60 years ago, but, in retrospect, strangely appropriate for now. John would speak first: "See you later, Alligator." And I would reply, usually with a smile he could read: "After a while, Crocodile." Isn't that another way of stating the truth of our future reunion found in my poem "A Parting Song" from "Penny 12"?

**Friday, December 26, 2008.** Christmas has come and gone, but here at Sky View we have more celebrating to do. A second snowstorm on Sunday forced the cancellation of our family Christmas service. Happily, we were able to reschedule the service for Sunday, the 28th.

Leo went by train to North Carolina to spend Christmas with our son David and his family. I have had visitors, too. On Dec. 24, John's son and daughter came to bring me Christmas greetings and to talk about their father, whose funeral had been the day before. Later on I had a visit from Paul Pinsker's son and daughter-in-law. Both visits proved again that true, satisfying friendships can be formed in old age, even in a nursing home!

On Christmas Day Marty came to see me in the afternoon. She brought with her the entire TNIV Bible on CDs, suggesting that we listen to Luke 2 together, for the reading of that chapter to our assembled family had been a part of the celebration of Christmas all her growing up years. After that we listened to Psalms 23 & 24, and Romans 8. What a treat! And what a gift! I look forward to “reading” the entire Bible this way, and will always remember the image of my daughter and I listening together on Christmas Day.

A couple hours later, 4 men knocked and then entered my room: George and his 3 sons, Eric, Evan, and Andrew. What a pleasure it has been watching these grandsons grow into manhood! All 3 are planning to take part in the Christmas service, as they have done for many years now. My cup is full and running over!

**Sunday, December 28, 2008.** This afternoon at 2:30, in the Main Living Room downstairs, we held our Christmas Service with Verna and Family. All the tasteful, beautiful decorations were still in place, giving a lovely backdrop for our presentation. George was so glad to be able to give this program; his sweet spirit blanketed the whole area with peace. George was assisted by his three sons and by Cliff Cullum, who took the place of Leo, as he was still on vacation. Filling important supportive roles were Janet and our friend Vallie Turner. After all the holiday entertainment we have had at Sky View in the past few weeks, it felt RIGHT to be ending our Christmas celebrations where they started more than 2000 years ago: with the focus on Jesus.

**Tuesday, December 30, 2008.** Yesterday marked the third anniversary of my arrival at Sky View! To me, these 3 years have flown by. Will I still be here next year at this time? GOD knows, and that’s good enough for me!

Time to close another Penny essay. I’m anxious to get back to my book projects. I’ve already done all the revising I intend to do on the Heavenly Thoughts book. After I finish an essay I’m writing on retirement and insert it where it belongs, I will consider that book to be complete, and begin working on the other two.

I made a happy discovery early in November. The deluxe feeding tube that I got this summer proved to have a weak spot: the soft, rubbery material that surrounded the plug at the end of the tube. After months of being tugged on by various nurses so I could be fed and medicated, this material began to come off. Then I noticed that, unlike all my other tubes, this one had a replaceable end! When I pointed out the situation to the nurse supervisor, she said Sky View kept a supply of these replacements on hand! And so, a night or two later, the exchange was made – so easily. This one works as well as the other one had in that there is no leakage. Thank you, Lord!

**Wednesday, December 31, 2008.** Leo is back home after a week long vacation in North Carolina. He came to see me today, bringing me hugs and kisses from several people, as well as much news, all of which I was eager to hear. If you gather from this that he had a good time, you are correct!

As another year is concluding and a new one is about to begin, words from my essay “To This Day” come to mind and bring me peace. This same inner peace is what I wish you in 2009:

The Lord who has been my shepherd all my life to this day  
Will surely be there to guide me all the rest of the way.