

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 17

OCTOBER – DECEMBER, 2009

Thursday, October 1, 2009. This evening I experienced a moment so wonderful that I decided to describe it as the first entry of my Penny 17 essay. When Andrea, my reflexologist and friend, arrived for our weekly session together, she called my attention to some unusual cloud formations that she had been admiring on her trip here. Indeed they WERE beautiful, I agreed, as I parked my chair facing the window. Andrea put on the CD of calming music with nature sounds that we often listen to during our sessions, and then positioned herself on a chair facing me. Andrea, a high school classmate of my oldest son George and his wife Janet, has a sweet, serene personality that makes it a pleasure for me to be in her company. Besides that, she enjoys using her reflexology skills on me as much as I enjoy receiving them. It's a win-win situation whenever we are together.

I was very comfortable in my tilted chair, basking in the remembrance of the worship service we had presented this afternoon, and thinking, "Could anything be finer than this?" when suddenly a rainbow appeared against the clouds, bringing with it, as usual, thoughts of God! One joy followed another in such a short period of time this evening that it seemed like my "cup" was full and running over, resulting in a deep contentment and peace. Psalm 46:10 came to mind: "Be still, and know that I am God." Yes, indeed, God was there, and I both saw and felt his smile. This was a taste of eternity on earth!

I'm so glad I recorded this moment, if only for my sake, so I can recall it as one of my many blessings. "Thank you, Lord! I love you!"

Thursday, October 8, 2009. Yesterday I got my seasonal flu shot here at Sky View. My nurse asked me if I wanted one. When I said yes, she first checked my temperature and then gave me the shot. That was one item crossed off my To Do list.

Then today a second item was crossed off: my wheelchair was repaired! Ever since my chair came back from the factory repair shop, there were other things that were not right, including a few that made me wonder if the chair was safe. Not satisfied with the diagnosis of our former mechanic, my daughter Marty located a local company that made home repairs on wheelchairs, and called for an appointment. "He'll try to fit you in this week," Marty emailed, stating that she would let me know the day and time later. My one hope was that I would be out of bed and in my chair before he came, so I could demonstrate my concerns.

Early this morning my aide came in and said my room was scheduled for a thorough housecleaning today and I had to be in my chair and ready to leave by 9:30, nearly 3 hours earlier than usual. As I drove out of my room, a man came up to me and said, "I have come to fix your chair." Since my room was off-limits, we went into the hallway, where I showed him the problems. It took him a while to correct them all, but he did it, and I was satisfied. I also thanked God for the unusual circumstances that got me into my chair in time. I did not know about either appointment ahead of time, but God did!

Wednesday, October 14, 2009. In Penny 16 I wrote about getting a gift ready for the celebration of 40 years of marriage for my brother Bob Ziegler and his wife Esther. The actual event took place in Baltimore, Maryland on Saturday, October 10. Bob's side of the family was represented by 3 of our children: George, David, and Marty; by their spouses: Janet, Dana, and Ed Ford; and by Eric, the oldest son of George and Janet. As reports keep coming in to me from various attendees, including Bob and Esther, it is obvious that this was a special occasion for everybody.

Bob and Esther had requested that their guests bring family stories and mementoes to the gathering. I had many items in storage that I was glad to pass on to my brother at this time, including the Bible that our great-grandfather, J.Y. King, used in his final years as an itinerant evangelist, along with two small notebooks in which he recorded the places he preached and the texts he used for each service. What a wealth of information is contained in these three items that belonged to a man who died in his prime in 1906!

Many of the family history stories I sent were written in the 1990's for my children and grandchildren as Christmas gifts. They are part of a series of essays I hope to gather into a book called *When I Was A Child*. Now I have a new essay for that book, for I plan to edit the story I wrote for Bob and Esther about a 1950 Ziegler family portrait until it becomes accessible to a general audience, in the order of "Childhood Portrait," which is on my website. I certainly have a lot of interesting work to occupy my mind!

Friday, October 30, 2009. Today we had our Halloween costume competition and parade at Sky View. The decorations were put into place nearly a month ago, since Casey, our activities director, really likes this holiday. I enjoy seeing the creativity that goes into the costumes, both for the residents and the staff. My favorite this year actually won the award for best costume in the residential category. It was a long, lacy bridal outfit worn by Judy, who lives on my floor. One of the younger residents of Sky View, Judy had already been here several years before I arrived nearly four years ago. She sits in a tilted wheelchair with a large tray, dependent on others to move and feed her. Yet she really enjoys life and wants to take part in everything. Her main trademarks are a big, broad smile and the compliments she dispenses so freely.

As I said, Judy was dressed as a bride for the competition. She wore a white headpiece with veiling attached. The dress was somehow attached to her own clothes at the top, and the skirt was draped over the tray and came down to Judy's shoes. The effect was stunning: it looked like she was actually wearing the dress – but she wasn't! Like a happy bride, Judy was beaming as she was being wheeled down the aisle. No wonder she won the prize!

Something else happened very early this morning that I will tell you under the title of –

THE CLEAN (?) TISSUE

Routines play a large role in my everyday life here at Sky View. For example, when I am put to bed, my aides know that I want to be given two tissues. Often that is all I need for the whole night. If I use both of them, the night aides know that I only want one for the rest of the time I am in bed. These aides, who work from 11 PM to 7 AM, routinely come into my room twice during their shift both to change and to turn me.

Around 2 AM today a sweet night aide that I had not seen for a long time came in to begin her work. Lovely as a model, she was also capable, kind and patient. I say she was patient because instead of becoming frustrated when she could not understand my signs, she brought me my Lightwriter and let me type my request. Both of us were happy with that visit.

At 6:30 she was back, and again all went well. At the end, since both of my used tissues had been discarded, I indicated that I wanted a tissue. She understood, and got the box, from which I extracted one. With a cheery smile, she also pulled out one with her gloved hand and said, "I'll give you another one just in case." I shook my head, thinking she would understand and return the tissue to the box. She did understand my refusal, but instead of putting it in the box, she threw it in the waste can! Stunned, I made a noise and reached out toward the tissue.

What a jumble of thoughts rushed into my mind at that moment, each demanding attention! I was filled with love for my son George and his wife Janet, who so faithfully keep me supplied with tissues that are softer than the ones issued by Sky View, and neither of whom would have been even slightly bothered by the discarded tissue. Recently they were in my room when a clean tissue fell from my lap to the floor. George picked it up, but instead of handing it to me, he threw it away! That time, too, I had protested. "You wouldn't use a tissue that had been on the floor, would you?" George asked. Up until now I would have answered, "Yes, I would!" Was I being asked by God to reconsider my definition of "clean" and "dirty" with this incident?

And what happened to the tolerance toward "tissue waste" that I had been cultivating so carefully these past few years, I wondered? I thought I had moved beyond reacting strongly to things as minor as tissues. Obviously this issue is more complex than I had thought, probably reaching back to my childhood, when my dependence on tissues began. Was this a pop quiz sent by God to keep me humble? Or to get me to see that in my life the subject of tissues was not minor, but MAJOR, and had to be thoroughly confronted?

As for my interaction with the aide, why hadn't I simply accepted her kind offer? Have I become so comfortable with my routines that I am no longer flexible? Why was I prolonging the visit of this wonderful woman who had told me she has four more residents to take care of before she goes home? How silly I felt, and how disappointed I was with my behavior! This was surely MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING! I wished I could drop the whole matter!

It seems to me that all these were simultaneous thoughts; they didn't seem linear at all. Matter of fact, my thoughts were more in the form of scenes and feelings, rather than words. It was something different, to be sure! I tried to end my request by smiling and making gestures that I hoped would say, "Never mind. Cancel that." But my aide would not let the matter drop. Instead, she got my Lightwriter and said, "Tell me what you want." Rather than saying that everything is okay, I typed, "I want the clean tissue from the waste can." A second chance, and again I failed!

"You mean this one?" she said, holding the unused tissue aloft. I nodded and reached for it. "But it's dirty now," she said. I shook my head and kept on reaching. "Oh, you're messing with me!" she smiled, as she returned the tissue to the waste can. By then I had gone too far to give up. Again I shook my head and reached out. Finally the tissue was in my hand, we exchanged parting smiles, and she was gone, no doubt forgetting the incident as soon as she left my room.

On the other hand, I will be musing on this story in the time to come. Only God knows why I felt compelled to record it, but I'm glad I did. Lessons can be learned from anything, even a tissue!

P.S.: Today is **Friday, November 20, 2009**. I am inserting this entry here rather than in chronological order to show you what 3 weeks of musing has done. I discussed the story with Marty and with George and Janet. As a result, I made some clarifying changes in the text, and FINALLY I have come to understand the difference between an "unused" and a "clean" tissue! That the two words were synonymous in my mind is obvious to me now from the story. In truth, a tissue that I never used on my nose or mouth can get dirty in many other ways, such as being on the floor or in a waste can, or by sitting on my chest for hours waiting to be used.

Another pop quiz. Again during the early hours of today I had a sweet, new aide whom I had only seen a few times. Although she worked well, she seemed fearful of doing something wrong. When tissue time arrived, she gave me one and then offered me a second. When I shook my head and pointed to the box, the aide broke into a big smile. "For me?" she asked, as she tucked the tissue into a pocket on her uniform. I was totally surprised, the element needed for me to call this a pop quiz, for no one had ever pocketed one of my tissues before! This time I nodded and smiled, even though she had misunderstood me. She was still smiling when she left my room. So was I! This story is about much more than tissues, isn't it?

Sunday, November 1, 2009. What a pleasant surprise I had this morning, on the day we returned to Standard Time instead of Daylight Savings Time. I was well rested due to the extra hour of sleep we got last night, when a tap came on my door – and there was Dannie, the aide I had the first year I was at Sky View! He was returning home from his job as a night aide at the nearby Veteran's Hospital when he decided to make a side trip to Sky View. I'm so glad he did! Visits don't have to be long or even frequent to keep people bound at heart. I wonder if this, too, is a taste of eternity?

Dannie and I have a friend in common: Carolyn Burke, the person who is my traveling companion when I go on trips via Paratransit. She works as a night nurse at the Veteran's Hospital, so you can see the connection. Carolyn took me to the Jefferson Valley Mall to do some shopping this past Wednesday, October 28. It turned out to be a pleasant, successful trip. Word got to Dannie, which led to the visit. God knows how to weave people together!

P.S.: I had intended to end this entry with the above paragraph, but two interesting things happened the night I finished typing it. First, my night aide Tina asked me if I remembered writing a letter in which I passed along to the administration a compliment she had made about the laundry department. Yes, I remembered. "Can you believe it's still on the bulletin board?" she said, her face aglow. "A couple times they moved it, but they have not taken it down. You know, that was a nice compliment for the administration to receive!" I wished I could say to her, "Tina, the kind words were yours; I just passed them along." But, of course, I couldn't do that, so I smiled and nodded instead.

I do believe in the power of secondhand compliments and enjoy passing them along when I can. And then the second thing happened: back to my mind came some wonderful compliments I heard at the start of my trip to the mall with Carolyn, beautiful words I had already forgotten! From that time on, I felt as if I had been given an assignment from my Teacher, which I am now about to fulfill. Here is a copy of the note I plan to deliver to the administration as soon as I can. By the date you will notice a passage of time. I will explain about that in my next entry.

November 16, 2009.

To the Administration and Staff of Sky View

From Verna Kwiatkowski, 413

An incident occurred on October 28 that I want to relay to you, as it speaks so well of Sky View. My traveling companion and friend, Carolyn, and I were boarding a Paratransit bus for a trip to the Jefferson Valley Mall. After we were in place, but before the bus began to roll, the driver asked Carolyn if she worked at Sky View. "No," she said. "I'm just here to take my friend shopping."

"I like coming to Sky View," the driver said. "The view is spectacular and the staff members are so cooperative and friendly." Before I finished wondering how a Paratransit driver would get to know the staff, other than perhaps the person at the front desk, he explained that he used to be an ambulette driver, and that way he interacted with many people throughout the building. "Sky View is the best," he concluded.

"I agree," said Carolyn, who is also a nurse. "I have been in many facilities, and Sky View is the best."

I thought you would like to know this. I cannot compare Sky View to other places, but I can say that I am very glad to be here. I need to be in a medical facility, as proven by the current bout of pneumonia, from which I am still recovering. I was well cared for by Kathy and a whole team of doctors, nurses, and technicians. Please know that I am grateful! Verna

Monday, November 30, 2009. You know from the preceding letter that I was ill recently. It all began on Monday, November 2 with an allergy attack, probably caused by a combination of pollens blown into my room through my open window; the fragrance in a lotion I had begun using on my face; and the scent of strong chemicals that were used to clean equipment several nights in a row near my open door. All of these situations have now been addressed, but not before the damage was done. My symptoms were SO familiar: a constant dripping of clear mucous from my nose; a tickle in my throat that I knew would lead to the loss of my voice (while I can't talk, I can still make noise, a useful component of my communication skills); coughing up more clear mucous, most of which I promptly swallowed, as the condition of my tongue does not allow me to spit it out; and a lethargy that kept me away from the computer and glued to the TV set. Then, too, every time I swallowed, there was the danger that I would aspirate, which would set off a horrible coughing spell. Though allergy attacks are not contagious, I chose to isolate myself, keeping those coughing spells as private as possible.

It "so happened" that November 2 was the day my doctor came to give me my monthly checkup. As my lungs seemed clear, he said he would prescribe medicine that would dry up some of the mucous, and then left. That medicine, prescribed for 3 days, gave me enough of a respite that I was able to take part in 3 events that I had been looking forward to:

1. "Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends" on Thursday. I sat in a place that would allow me to leave if I began to cough. How thankful I was that I was able to stay until the end! The last song was an old one we were using for the first time: "I'll Fly Away." With Earl Brown's wonderful gospel style of piano playing, the song was all I had hoped for and more!

2. A spelling bee on Friday. Since I had suggested to Casey, the director of activities, that she hold more spelling bees after the success of the first one in September, I wanted to encourage her by attending this event. I had fun there!

3. A Paratransit trip to the United Methodist Church in Shrub Oak on Saturday afternoon. This was the church I attended the majority of the time from my retirement until I could no longer go to church. Friends had arranged for the General Purpose room to be available for me to visit with anyone from the church who wanted to come. There were about 18 of us altogether, and what a good time we had in each other's company!

On Monday, the 9th, my nurse discovered that I had a low-grade fever. After consulting with the doctor, an X-ray and blood work were ordered and I was put on a mild antibiotic. I remember thinking, "Even if I have pneumonia and die from it, I am so glad I was well enough to attend those three events!"

After the X-ray showed I had pneumonia in my lower right lobe, I was put on a much stronger antibiotic for 7 days. In time my mucous supply dried up, the coughing spells abated, the fever left, my voice came back and so did my energy. I wrote the November 16 letter of appreciation that I have shared with you – and then it was time to write the December service and celebrate Thanksgiving! Both of those are accomplished now, giving me time to catch up on Penny 17. One more entry should complete the job.

Wednesday, December 2, 2009. If you have been reading my Penny essays regularly, you know I enjoy watching major league baseball games during the season. If not, you know it now! My favorite team, the Mets, had a very poor year, causing my interest to wane early. I thought I would skip the playoff games and the World Series this year, but when October arrived, my interest revived and I watched at least part of most games. My daughter MaryBeth, who lives north of Boston in Massachusetts, is a Boston Red Sox fan. When her team was eliminated in the first round of the playoff competition, she sent me this email: "The good news is: I'll be getting a lot more sleep in the month

of October than I thought I would!" Delighted with her response to the loss, I replied: "May you continue to always see the glass as half full!"

It turned out that the New York Yankees and the Philadelphia Phillies won the pennants in their respective leagues, making them rivals in the World Series competition. What memories that match-up brought to mind! 1950 was the first full year that I followed major league baseball. A native of Pennsylvania, I became a Phillies fan in a very exciting year. They had not won the national league pennant for 35 years, but with a victory in the last game of the season, the elusive pennant was theirs! So elated were their fans about this achievement that it almost didn't matter when the Yankees won the best of 7 World Series 4-0. This year the Yankees also won, but the record was 4-2. All these years later, I was happy that the Phillies at least won some games!

It's funny how 35 years seemed like a lifetime when I was 17 in 1950, and now it doesn't seem long at all!

Saturday, December 5, 2009. Two days ago we had our December service, which, as usual, was a joyful event. For the past few months I had been mulling over some new thoughts about angels and their Creator, and I ended up forming the whole service around these thoughts. Now I am wondering if I should turn the service into an essay or a meditation about angels. There's no end to the projects I would enjoy working on as long as God permits me to type!

Yesterday I took part in December's spelling bee. (Casey has decided to offer them as an activity once a month.) The bees are becoming quite popular! We need brain stimulation like that.

The past few weeks have been hard on us here on the 4th floor, as three residents have died, two of them on the same day. Within a day or two, the vacated beds are filled, usually with someone from the 5th floor, which is mainly used for rehabilitation. There are no empty beds at Sky View! The empty places in our hearts, however, are not so quickly filled. True friendships DO form among the residents, and true grieving DOES take place when a friend dies. Here, as elsewhere, those of us who have faith in God and who believe that life continues in Heaven for members of God's faith family, find comfort in our Lord, while still missing the friendship.

Gloria, one of the three who died recently, was a person of faith who loved going to our services. When she was unable to attend, I would save a handout sheet for her, as she had told me she kept the papers and read the hymn words and the prayers over and over between services. Gloria was also one of the people that I could easily talk with, that is, she knew how to respond to my Light-writer. From time to time I would drive up to her door and ring the doorbell that is on my machine. Gloria would laugh and invite me in for a chat. Twice in the last month Ruth, also a resident, was with us. It was then that I realized I could just as easily talk with her as with Gloria. So now I have a wonderful new friend, at least for a while. Let's cherish friendships while we can. Surely they are gifts from God.

Monday, December 7, 2009. At about 2 AM today, I woke up and found that Christmas and New Years' thoughts were flooding my mind. Figuring I could take a nap almost any time I wanted, I nurtured the thoughts rather than trying to get back to sleep. At times I dozed; when I woke up again, I tried to recall and develop some of the holiday ideas. Here is one that I remember:

B.C.

It is generally accepted as a fact that Jesus was born a few years B.C. The letters B and C, consecutive in our alphabet, took on new meaning when I thought of this:

Jesus was Born in Bethlehem so he could be Crucified on Calvary – B before C!

The Crucifixion could not have taken place without the Birth, but the Birth could have taken place without the Crucifixion. If Jesus had called on legions of angels to prevent his being crucified, he would have been reduced to being just a nice man, plus an interesting teacher with some healing powers. Sadly this is how some people really do think of him, rather than the Savior of the world, which he actually is. Before the Birth, Jesus was the Creator and the Centerpiece of everything. Of him it was said, “All things were made by him and for him” (Colossians 1:16). From that extremely high position, Jesus took two huge downward plunges, approximately 33 years apart, the first one resulting in his Birth and the other in his Crucifixion. He didn’t remain down, however. Instead, after he hit bottom, he bounced back again to his highly exalted position. Here’s how the apostle Paul explains it in Philippians 2:5-11:

THE FIRST PLUNGE

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

THE SECOND PLUNGE

And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

THE EXALTATION

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Each segment of the story of Jesus is awesome, and deserves not only to be remembered, but celebrated! Oh, come, let us adore him: Christ, the Lord!

Monday, December 21, 2009. In the two weeks since my last entry, I have been busy with other typing projects, both on the computer and on my Mailbug, which I use for emailing. By my choice, I still have no Internet connection. Because of the limited use I have of my arms, hands, and fingers. It is hard enough for me to have reference books that I cannot handle on my shelves; imagine what it would be like to have the Internet on my computer and not be able to use it!

Actually, my reference books are not useless to me, for I can – and do! – have my visitors look up information for me. And the Internet is also available to me on the two computers on the first floor at Sky View, though I cannot use it on my own. If necessary, Leo takes me to the downstairs computers and shows me what I need to see.

I just finished watching the Sidney Poitier movie “Lilies of the Field.” You may recall that Poitier’s character, Homer Smith, wanted to build a chapel for the nuns all by himself, and was very upset and disappointed when others insisted on helping. The image of Homer pouting over the matter is one that I want to keep in my mind in case I ever start fuming about the things I can no longer do by myself; it was not a pretty picture! So far, though, by God’s grace, this has not been much of a problem for me. I’m just thankful that there are people around to give me the help I need!

One of the projects I mentioned was turning the B.C. meditation from my December 7 entry into a 2009 Christmas letter. Really, there wasn’t much to do. I added a few introductory lines and made some minor edits, and there it was – my Christmas letter, unexpectedly done! I used to send out a lot

of Christmas cards, as I liked being caught up with my correspondence once a year. That custom is now a thing of the past for me. This year, though, I did have Marty mail some of the Christmas letters to friends for whom I have no email address. I would like to be back in touch with some of these people. Also, Marty posted the letter on my website, and that's where some of you read it. I'm glad we have so many ways of communicating now. Friendships and family relationships are precious treasures, aren't they? "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God" (1 John 4:7).

Thursday, December 24, 2009. Christmas Eve! What an appropriate time to give a Christmas service! And that's just what happened this afternoon at Sky View. "Christmas Service with Verna and Family," a program assembled and moderated by George, was appreciated by the staff, residents, and their visitors who were there. George's sons, Andrew (violin) and Evan (trumpet) also took part, as did Leo and Cliff Cullum.

Afterwards, Leo began reminiscing about the keyboard that our son uses when he gives a service. I remember why and when we bought it. In 1984 I began teaching a Bible course called "Set Free." Unlike my other Bible seminars, singing Scripture songs was an integral part of the new course. When I taught in church, I used the piano that was there. Then some friends wanted me to teach "Set Free" in their Christian Bookstore, which did not have a piano! Leo and I came up with the solution together – we needed to buy a portable keyboard. Leo remembers searching the music stores in White Plains, NY, where he worked, for just the right instrument for me, one that would have weighted keys, so when I played, it would have the feel of a piano keyboard. After he had narrowed down the possibilities, I joined him in White Plains to try them out and make my selection.

That keyboard has so many memories tied to it! For one thing, it speaks of the way Leo and I worked as a team, supportive of each other as ministry opportunities came our way. Right now my head is awirl with other thoughts concerning Leo, our family, the places where we have served the Lord, and more. But now I want to skip to the passing of the baton, so to speak. It was in the Friday evening worship services at Drum Hill that I played for the last time. By late 2004, my disease had progressed to the point where I was glad to turn the keyboard and speaking duties over to George. Then when I moved into Sky View – 4 years ago next week! – the keyboard became his, and how well he is using it!

And now, guess what? It's time to write the January service!

Tuesday, December 29, 2009. The service is not finished yet, but since it is outlined and well underway, I decided to take time off to complete Penny 17 on this momentous day: the start of my 5th year at Sky View! One day at a time, how quickly the years accumulate!

In December three more women from the 4th floor died, besides the three I already mentioned. When you live or work in a nursing home, death is a constant reality that must be faced! Two of those who died had the same first name. They used to sit next to each other in the 4th floor lobby and revel in the fact that they were both named Beatrice. It was fun to watch, and now the memory brings me a smile.

As for my health, I can feel more stiffening in my limbs, especially in my arms. My feeding tube is getting clogged frequently now. I have had this one almost 18 months, far longer than any other. Sky View changed my formula recently. Now I get 1 liter of Jevity every night (still 1200 calories). I have been taken off ProStat 101. I am still a happy person who enjoys my life with God. Happy New Year to all my readers!