

## A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 22

JANUARY – MARCH, 2011

**Monday, January 17, 2011.** Hello, Everyone! If you have read Penny 21, you know I completed it in January, having been hampered by illness from mid-December into the new year. I had more that I wanted to record, but two unwritten rules stopped me:

1. The thought that I must complete an issue every 3 months.
2. The desire I have to limit myself to a maximum of 9 pages, preferably 8.

Concerning #1 – It's curious that I put this pressure only on myself. After I have completed an issue, it goes to my son George for editing, which includes a consultation with me, then to my daughter Marty, who puts it on my website, then back to George, who notifies those on our email list that a new edition is ready. All this may take several weeks, depending on what else is going on in our children's lives at the time. Meanwhile, I doubt if anyone is concerned because a Penny issue is "late." Hmmm. Maybe I should consider going to 4-month issues! We'll see.

Concerning #2 – I was in the middle of page 8 when I got sick. By the time I was well enough to do some typing, I knew I had more than 1 and a half pages of material that I wanted to record, making it easier to stop at the end of page 8. After all, I have made no rule against recording the events of previous months after the fact! So that's what I will do, mingling past news with current happenings, until, eventually, I catch up.

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**Tuesday, January 18, 2011.** In December I wrote a birthday poem for my resident friend, Ruth. I had it printed on special paper, and then asked her to come to my room, as I had a gift for her. Ruth beamed with joy when she saw the poem, and then proceeded to read it aloud in her own special way. "I might read this to others," she said, and I smiled and clapped my approval, mentally taking note of her plan to share her poem.

On a related subject: Under the direction of Diane, our social worker, Dina, a social work intern from a local college, has been assigned to revive "Sky View's Horizons," the literary magazine that was started a few years ago, and then dropped. I volunteered to be on the resident committee that would work with Dina on this project. A number of times over the past couple months Dina came to my room to discuss the magazine, but never did the full committee meet – UNLESS – I was the only volunteer! Nevertheless, I did enjoy giving Dina suggestions and my own submissions.

I wished that Ruth would write something for the magazine, but it seemed she wouldn't be doing that. Then I got an idea. I asked George to read Ruth's poem to see if he thought it was too personal to publish. Thinking I was referring to my Penny essays, he said he felt my readers would benefit from a picture of what kind of relationships could be formed in a nursing home. This gave me another idea to file in my brain!

Meanwhile, I asked George to bring Ruth from the lobby into my room. She watched while I typed, "Would you like to have your special poem published in Sky View's magazine?" "YES!" she replied, her face breaking out into a smile worthy of her enthusiastic response. I asked if she would be willing to write a few lines giving permission for us to publish her poem. She said yes, provided she could do it "tomorrow."

The next day she appeared in my room with a pen and a plain copy of the poem. Here is what she wrote above the poem: "This is a note from Ruth Parton. My friend Verna gave me this poem as a

Birthday gift. Now I want to share it with you.” And now, because of what George said, her poem will be in TWO publications: Sky View’s Horizons and Penny 22. Here it is:

FOR RUTH PARTON

*By Verna Kwiatkowski  
A Sky View poem.*

Happy birthday to you, my dear friend Ruth!  
I am glad for this day, for to tell you the truth,  
I have been wondering how I could do  
Something truly extra special for you –  
And what could be more down to earth  
Than honoring the day that gave you birth?

“Five days before Christmas,” you often said to me  
So I could remember when your big day would be.  
Now the day is coming fast; it’s just around the corner!  
And I am writing a poem for the friend I desire to honor.  
I hear your voice as I write, and anticipate your smile.  
The joy you will exhibit makes all my effort worthwhile.

This year we have been a duo: I, the writer, you, the reader.  
We’ve had great experiences, with “GOD” as our Leader.  
I’m sure you will agree without needing persuasion  
That God and our faith play a big part in the equation  
Of our meeting here at Sky View, and becoming friends.  
Both of us rejoice that with God, a friendship never ends!

“I am at your command,” I often hear from your lips,  
And you are quick to prove it whenever my foot slips.  
Back to their platform you gently guide my feet.  
I feel so much better then, and the fellowship is sweet.  
Many other things you do: my request, your command;  
We work side by side, and proverbially, hand in hand.

Memories of shopping for needy children far away,  
And visiting the sick who lie in bed day by day,  
Riding on the elevators (for I cannot ride by myself),  
Services, playing games, getting things from my shelf:  
All of them combine to give me just what I need –  
A birthday poem for me to give to you to read!

December 18-19, 2010.  
Verna Kwiatkowski

**Thursday, January 20, 2011.** Now that I have included Ruth’s poem, I will also include one that I wrote just four days ago, to give you a further insight into the interactions I have with people here at Sky View. I hope you laugh as you read this, for we certainly did! To understand the ending, remember that I have a feeding tube; I haven’t eaten cake for at least 6 years! Again, the copy I gave

Geneva was printed on special paper. "She's going to love this," Marty said as she took the finished copy from my printer. Well, she did! Here is the poem, which she plans to frame:

### A SLICE OF CHOCOLATE BIRTHDAY CAKE

*By Verna Kwiatkowski, for Geneva,  
one of my night aides at Sky View.*

Geneva, I know your birthday has passed,  
For you told me it was in the middle of last  
week. I made signs to say "Happy Birthday!"  
You caught on. You usually know what I "say."

But you didn't stop there; you went on instead,  
Making a request that remained stuck in my head:  
You would come for a slice of birthday cake, you said,  
Adding: "Chocolate, my favorite," while I was still in bed!

It was all said in fun; I knew that very well.  
I like the good clean fun I find where I dwell.  
So I decided to bake you the best chocolate cake  
My imaginary ingredients would allow me to make.

It is round, with two layers, and chocolate icing too,  
But it is also festive, in ways I will describe to you:  
It has multi-colored sprinkles, for I do like variety,  
And various colorful candles make it so pretty!

So cut yourself a slice, and enjoy it whenever you can.  
It will always be moist and sweet, and on every diet plan:  
It has zero calories! Even I can eat cake of this kind!  
So let's eat cake as often as you wish. I won't mind!

GOD BLESS YOU, GENEVA!

Love, Verna 413  
January 16, 2011

**Friday, January 21, 2011.** Besides our regular services in December and January, we had two special services that I want to describe. The first was "Christmas Service with Verna and Family," and it took place on Friday, December 24 – Christmas Eve! George is in charge of assembling and moderating all "Verna and Family" services. He uses materials that I have written in the past, always asking as well if I have some new things for him to incorporate into the service. This year he used my meditation on the hymn "Ivory Palaces," which is printed in Penny 21. There were other things that were different this year. Andrew, recovering from a broken finger, was unable to play the violin, and George invited Bill Harris, a friend from the past, to sing "O Holy Night" as a solo, and to lead the congregational singing. I was not feeling well at all that day, but since my nurse did not think I was contagious, at the last minute I decided to go. I'm so glad I did!

The other special service was held on Saturday, January 8, just 2 days after our service, and was listed on the Activities Calendar as a "Live Concert with Gospel Musician Julie Nevel." Cliff Cullum, the man who usually moderates Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends, and I met Julie at a

local concert about 10 years ago, and Cliff stayed in touch with her ever since. When he made arrangements for Julie to come from Pennsylvania to provide music for his church on January 9, she asked if she could give a concert at my nursing home on the 8th. And what a wonderful concert she gave! It was a good blend of songs she had written herself and standard gospel songs woven into medleys. Hands clapped and feet moved with some of the numbers. Ruth and I sat together, and both of us – and everyone else – enjoyed it so much! To God be the glory!

I am enjoying writing this journal and catching up on the past, but now I must pause and write the service for February. I'll continue journaling as soon as I can.

**Saturday, January 29, 2011.** I finished the service yesterday. Now I am eager to return to Penny, especially since I see light at the end of the tunnel: catch-up time is near!

We have been having an unusually cold, snowy winter, with records being broken all around us. The first storm was a blizzard, starting Sunday afternoon, December 26, the same day the Dyers, including my daughter MaryBeth, set out from Massachusetts to spend two days with their New York relatives! They had no problem getting here, but the rest of the trip provided the kind of adventure stories that their family will be telling for many years!

The Dyers came first to see me, both to visit and to accomplish a chore I had asked MaryBeth to do for me, that is, to clean my desk and its appliances. This included going through piles of papers that I cannot handle – literally. One of my longtime friends wrote from afar and said she thinks of me as the energizer bunny in a wheelchair. She asked if that description suited me. No, it does not! In fact, I do not have much energy at all! The amount of physical work that I can do is severely limited, as is my ability to shift positions in my wheelchair. Mentally I may be an energizer bunny, but not physically. I was really pleased when the project was completed. Others do for me what I cannot do, and I am grateful.

It was snowing all the while the Dyers were with me, and during their next visit with Leo, Marty, and Ed. All I know of their trip to the motel is that it was scary! This was the blizzard that crippled New York City, including shutting down the train lines. Marty, who was on vacation the last week of the year, had made plans to take the train to Manhattan with the Dyers on Monday morning; instead, they were in Peekskill watching the Internet to see when the trains would resume their schedule. In the afternoon, my family boarded the first train heading for the city from the north, the snow only adding to their sense of adventure. I was so happy for them! At the same time, I was glad I could remain indoors where it was warm and dry.

We have had a major snowstorm every week since the blizzard, with smaller storms in between. Every storm disrupts our schedule of workers here at Sky View. Those who are here when the snow begins to fall may volunteer to stay another shift to make up for those who can't come in (or they may be mandated to stay), but one way or another, we get the care we need. That's a wonderful thing!

I saw an amazing sight on Tuesday, January 25th. On the snowy ledge outside my window was a solitary bird – a ROBIN!! Two things made this amazing to me: First, in all my life, where seeing the first robin was considered a sign of spring, I never saw one in January. They arrived in late February at the earliest, or any time in March, and were always a source of joy. Why was this robin so early? Perhaps as yet another sign that all around us things are changing, from weather patterns to the movements of wildlife. We are changing, too! But God never changes; he is still our anchor in times of turbulence. The second reason I was amazed was that I had not seen any robins at all since we left our home on Mead Street in Yorktown Heights seven years ago this month. I looked for them at Drum Hill and at Sky View, and found none – until four days ago!

\* \* \* LAUGH OF THE DAY \* \* \*

This afternoon (Saturday, January 29) I headed downstairs to play Scattergories with my fellow residents. Ruth was at the elevator with the same idea in mind; so we went down together. At the table on the first floor, Ruth and I sat next to each other, except I pulled back enough to let Brittany, an Activities worker, sit by me. Scattergories is a game in which a letter of the alphabet is chosen, and then we are given 12 categories in which we must write down an answer that begins with the chosen letter. In my case, I type my answer on my Lightwriter and Brittany writes it on paper. The game is very competitive, for only answers that no one else has score points at the end of the game. It occurred to me that Ruth could easily look at my screen and see my answers, but I knew she would not do that.

Part way into the first game, Ruth noticed that I had written something on my screen. Obviously thinking it was a message for her, she leaned forward to get a closer look. Just then I clapped my hand over the screen as if a cheating classmate were trying to copy my answers in school. Instantly Ruth realized what she was doing. The look of shock on her face was priceless! "Caught!" it said. She didn't have time to be embarrassed, however, for immediately I burst out laughing. Ruth and Brittany joined me in hearty laughter. Now our private joke has become a story to be shared. Enjoy!

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**Tuesday, February 1, 2011.** I woke up to a familiar sound today: that of a snowplow clearing Sky View's driveway. From 4 floors up, I hear the plow very well, since my windows face the entrance to the building. According to the TV weather commentators, this is the 8th major storm in 5 weeks. It is expected to last 2 days. I wonder if we'll be able to have our service Thursday. Must wait and see!

**Friday, February 4, 2011.** Yes, we DID have our service yesterday! The storm Tuesday and Wednesday was mostly ice, mixed with a few inches of snow. Road conditions were horrible on both days; it was even dangerous to walk on that surface. On my outdoor ledge, I actually saw a bird slip on the icy mix, a sight I don't recall seeing before. (The bird wasn't hurt.) Yet Thursday and today the roads were fine for travel! Everyone on my team of friends was at the service except Earl, who was vacationing in Florida. Loretta was there to play the piano in his place. I am a person who likes to have alternate plans in mind whenever I am in charge of something, and yesterday we had to go with Plan B, even though everyone was present. Here is what happened:

When I arrived in the MLR (main living room) yesterday, Cliff told me that he had laryngitis, which came on him suddenly, and therefore he couldn't lead the service. Since loss of voice was his only symptom, Cliff came to Sky View, rather than making other arrangements, so he could set up the sound system (parts of which are his); bring us the handout sheets that he had made, as he does every month; and turn his part over to George (Plan B). George arrived, thinking he was going to play his cello and read the one part I had assigned to him. In reality, the cello never left its case, and George read much more than I had planned. I really enjoy the depth, flexibility, and commitment of the team God has assembled for me!

The theme of our service was Love, a theme I use in February because of Valentine's Day. This year I had a section on what I called "friendship love," or "one another love." After the service, Loretta came to me expressing her appreciation for being included in the team. "We have a real friendship love for each other, don't we?" I typed. She readily agreed. My prayer is that everyone present felt loved yesterday – loved by God and loved by us – and to God be the glory! Amen.

**Sunday, February 6, 2011.** I have only one more story to write from the backlog caused mainly by my illness, and this, being Super Bowl Sunday, would be a good time to tell it, for it has to do with

sports. You know from previous issues that I like to watch baseball games, especially following the Mets. "My" team was average in 2010; perhaps that's what led to these thoughts:

There are far more teams in the major sports that do NOT make it into the playoff games than those that do. Isn't it rather selfish, then, for the fans of certain teams to expect them to be in the playoffs every year? This leads to some fans rudely booing players who don't measure up to their expectations, an action I really don't like, as you can tell. I am responsible for reigning in my own emotions. Even in watching sports I want to be moderate, decent, and orderly for the glory of God. In the light of all eternity, it doesn't matter which teams won and which teams lost, but our behavior concerning the games, which both molds and reflects our character, DOES matter.

There are 2 sports stories that caught my attention in recent months, stories I want to remember by telling them to you in my journal. The first took place at a game that I was watching last September. That day Luis Hernandez was playing in his very first major league game, as 2nd baseman for the Mets. I am going to quote from a newspaper article by Steve Popper about what happened:

There was something special about Luis Hernandez's home run Saturday afternoon. Hernandez fouled a Tim Hudson pitch off his right foot in the fifth inning and went down hard. Assistant trainer Mike Herbst tended to him for a long time before Hernandez finally got to his feet and stepped back into the batter's box, crushing the next pitch into the right-field seats. But when he started to trot around the bases he began to hobble badly, taking what seemed like an eternity to finally get to home plate. The second baseman was then removed from the game and X-rays revealed a broken bone in his right foot.

The headline for the article commends Hernandez for his toughness. I keep thinking instead of what a great story Luis has to tell his children and grandchildren! I hope he gets to play for the Mets as a regular some day, but even if his major league baseball career ended on the same day it started, imagine this scenario 4 or 5 decades from now: Luis Hernandez surrounded by generations of family, one of whom says to him, "Grandpa, tell us again about the day you hit a home run for the NY Mets." Sweet!

The second sport story has to do with football. The Dyers gave me a DVD of the movie "The Blind Side" for Christmas. I've watched that movie so many times that I've lost count! It is the true story of Michael Oher, now playing professional football with the Baltimore Ravens. The interactions between Michael and the Tuohy family reminded me so much of the involvement our family had with others years ago (though not to that extent), which, I'm sure, is partly why it appeals to me so much. This fall I watched the NY Jets games on TV, but after seeing the movie I also watched some Ravens games, so I could see the real Michael Oher in action. It's amazing how much the actor and the football player resemble each other!

**Tuesday, February 8, 2011.** My drooling when I am seated in my chair became so bad that placing a few tissues on my chest was no longer sufficient to keep my shirts dry. Next I had my aides put a Sky View washcloth or a folded hand towel there. That's when Marty's creative wheels began to spin. She designed a bib comprised of a sturdy washcloth and a ribbon strap with clips at each end to keep the cloth in place. The prototype worked well, so I now have a set of bibs in different colors to wear as part of my outfit each day. It's the next best thing to not drooling!

The issue of Sky View's Horizons that Dina was working on has been completed and distributed. It has been well received, at least by all who spoke to me. Thirteen residents (including me) and Dina contributed to the contents of this magazine. The topics were as varied as we are! Dina wants to do another issue before she leaves us in May, so we must soon get back to work!

**Saturday, February 19, 2011.** The snowstorms have stopped, at least for now. During the height of the snow activity, MaryBeth sent me a picture from their local newspaper in Hamilton, Massachusetts. It shows the outdoor bulletin board of the South End Baptist Church, surrounded by deep snow that partially obstructs the Everyone Welcome! portion of the sign. Clearly visible, though, in all capital letters, was this message, which has caused many of us here at Sky View to chuckle:

WHOEVER IS PRAYING  
FOR SNOW  
PLEASE STOP

Completely unknown to her, God used MaryBeth's situation as a test for me these past couple weeks. She let her family know that she was scheduled for surgery on February 17th. (She had the surgery, came home the next day, and is doing well.) I was surprised to find myself strongly desiring to go up to Hamilton to help her, a totally irrational thought coming straight from my heart! I spent a lot of time pondering the implications of all this. Within myself, I feel as capable as ever. Usually my brain tells me that physically, this is not so. This time was different! I used the occasion to review my previous commitments to the Lord. Am I still willing to:

- accept without complaint the progressive illness that I have?
- give up without resentment all thought of traveling to visit or help out?
- trust God to work in the lives of my loved ones, no matter what the outcome of their life challenges?

Answer: By the grace of God, I am. I was pleased to notice a calmness within on the 17th that I knew came from God, and I was thankful!

**Saturday, February 26, 2011.** I finished writing the March service yesterday and took the rest of the day off from writing, except for some necessary record keeping. Now, in rereading the last entry, I am reminded of a custom practiced during my growing up years by the Annville Church of the Brethren, which all of us had joined. Every year teams of two deacons visited all the members of the church to ascertain if their faith in Jesus and their commitment to the church was still active. I remember those visits well. On the appointed night, our whole family sat in the living room with the deacons who, after preliminary greetings and chatter, would ask if we had any concerns we wanted to discuss with them. Then one of the men would get out the list of three questions that we were all expecting. The questions were always the same (good thing, for Mom had coached us to say Yes to all of them!), and we each, in turn, had to answer them. We would have given an honest Yes to them even without Mom's help!

It is a good thing to keep current with our God. He gives us tests, both unexpected and expected, so that we may know if our faith is growing. Let's be glad he loves us enough to keep our relationships with him fresh!

**Sunday, March 6, 2011.** This past Thursday and Friday were busy days for me. My stress level always goes up as the first Thursday approaches, because I am excited about it. Then on Wednesday my nurse manager told me I was going to the hospital on a stretcher Friday to get my feeding tube replaced. This brought stress of a different kind, for a tube change, while bringing with it many elements for which to give thanks, is not high on my list of favorite things to undergo!

The service was joyful by design, as the subject was praising God with our mouths to express the overflow of our grateful hearts. It was full of Scriptures, some of which we all read together. These were printed on the handout sheet that we give out every month, which also has the words to that month's songs. I found it interesting that two residents asked at the end for extra copies of the hand-

outs, one a person attending for the first time and one who has been with us from the start. Here are the hymns of praise and testimony that we sang on March 3: Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee; I Will Sing Of My Redeemer; I Love to Tell the Story; Sweeter as the Years Go By; and the Doxology. Are they familiar to you?

As for the tube, I think it could have lasted another month or two, but the nurses were worried, so I went along with them, thinking “better safe than sorry.” At the hospital, the aide who went with me and I waited 2-1/2 hours for my doctor to arrive. He apologized, but did not explain. He didn’t have to! Many years ago, when I was the medical emergency that kept a room full of patients wondering where the doctor was, I vowed that I would not complain when the roles were reversed and I had to wait. The actual exchange only took about 5 minutes, even though there was a complication when the old balloon broke while still in my stomach. I appreciate the fact that my doctor does not get ruffled when things happen; I respond well to his calmness. All ended well.

**Tuesday, March 15, 2011.** Not until I got ready to type just now did I realize that the 2 stories I want to tell are related! The first took place this past Friday night (actually in the early hours of Saturday, which seem to me like Friday night, since that’s when I went to bed). Two night aides rushed to my bedside, asking, “What’s the matter?” Through sleepy, puzzled eyes, I noticed that one of them was my friend Margaret, who had been transferred to another floor (see Penny 21). “Didn’t you ring?” she asked. As I shook my head, the other aide said, “The nurse asked me to check and see why Verna is crying.” At that, the pieces of the puzzle began to fall into place for me.

Margaret handed me my Lightwriter and I began to type: “In my dream I was crying.” I had no idea I was also ACTUALLY crying, especially loud enough for the night nurse to hear me! I can’t recall ever doing that before, and certainly not at Sky View. I was pleased to see the quick response to my distress. As a bonus I got to have a visit with Margaret, who was working on my floor for the night, but did not have me on her schedule.

I remember the dream. It was a variation of a dream I have often, with only the details differing. Unlike the others, though, this one had a sad ending. In the dreams, I do have PLS, but temporarily I have been given back the use of my voice, my arms, and my legs. I want to take advantage of my reprieve by teaching God’s Word in some way. Besides delight, I experience an urgency in these dreams; I have no time to waste! In Friday’s dream a weekly Bible study was being set up in someone’s house. There would be about 8 women attending, I was told, and they wanted me to begin with 1 Corinthians. When I arrived I found everything in disarray, with only half the members there. The rest arrived late, one extremely late, and seemed more interested in socializing than Bible study. Finally the group was seated. I stood up to pray aloud before teaching, and during that prayer was shocked when the hostess and another woman draped some cloths over me, chattering all the while, as if dressing me for a play! That was the last straw. I knew then that this group wasn’t interested in what I had to offer; the plan wasn’t going to work. And so – I sat down and cried my noisy, uncontrollable PLS cry.

My second story actually began last week, but I didn’t know about it until this morning. I have written about Perry, my regular daytime aide. Last week I didn’t have him at all, something that had happened once before, when he was temporarily assigned to another floor. When my nurse arrived this morning, I typed the word Perry on my Lightwriter, and received this news: “Perry doesn’t work on our floor anymore.” My suspicions were confirmed! It seemed so familiar – exactly like what I went through with Margaret last fall. This time, however, I only had to see if I still agreed with my previous conclusions, and I did: I made the choice to rejoice and to thank God for the time we had together. I’m sure there will be visits ahead, and then – eternity! God bless you, Perry.



**Friday, March 18, 2011.** Yesterday I got an email from George, who had visited me Wednesday evening. The subject of the email was “Lynne is happy, glad, and free!” I thought he was going to tell me that Lynne had called him, for she did that from time to time to check up on me. Instead, the first sentence said, “I came home to a message from her daughter that Lynne moved into her heavenly home on Saturday.” What a beautiful way to tell me that my friend was gone from the earth! The imagery my son used suggests that Lynne was a happy, active participant in her transfer from Brooklyn to Heaven, and that all went well, without a hitch! Oh, the wonderful thoughts swirling in my head as I write this! Yes, she is free now – free from the human body that was increasingly tying her down. By the way, in case you don’t know who Lynne is, check Penny 20, where I not only described her, but also included the poem I wrote for her 95th birthday.

P.S.: Perry came to visit me today! He was smiling.

**Thursday, March 31, 2011.** Time to conclude this issue of my Penny journal. I can do so without stress, for yesterday I finished writing the service for April 7. The service includes a prayer that we have never used before, one brought to my attention by George in a recent visit. The prayer is attributed to Richard of Chichester, from the mid-13th century. Here is the prayer, which we will all be reading together from our handout sheets:

Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which you have given us,  
for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us. Most merciful Redeemer,  
Friend, and Brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you  
more nearly day by day. Amen.

Isn’t that a beautiful prayer? Our theme next week is the death of Jesus, which will get us ready to celebrate his resurrection together on Easter. As I type this, I am overcome with gratitude to my God, who always does everything right, whose timing is perfect, and who knows how to bring people together for his glory, in this case, George, Richard of Chichester, and me. In the spiritual realm, this can happen, for members of God’s faith family are all alive, no matter what century they lived on earth.

With this delightful thought I will close Penny 22. Lord willing, I’ll see you again in Penny 23!