

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 24

JULY – SEPTEMBER, 2011

Saturday, August 6, 2011. Welcome – at last! – to Penny 24! There are two main reasons for my delay in getting this issue started: computer problems and projects with deadlines that took precedence over my journal. At the end of June, when I received my replacement computer, I was in a similar situation, described at the end of Penny 23. It took me well into July to finish the last entry. Then, in an attempt to repair a few snags that remained in the connection between the replacement and my printer, the computer closed down and had to be removed from my room for repairs. It was gone for about two weeks.

Prior to its breakdown, I had been working on the August service, and was happily making good progress. What a great chance this computer predicament was for me to practice giving my cares to the Lord, the very topic I was writing about! For the MOST part, it worked. I got the idea of using a service from the past for August, settling on June, 2009, and saving the August service for September. My habit of having full sets of papers from the services filed away by date has come in handy many times, and each time I rejoice. By the way, on Thursday, August 4 everything went just fine with our repeat program!

The other project that was more urgent than starting Penny 24 was assembling and editing the quarterly magazine called Sky View's Horizons. This summer issue was supposed to be printed during the last week of July. When my computer broke down, I asked Diane Gitelson, Sky View's director of social work and the person for whom I am working on this project, if we could have it ready by the first week in August rather than in July, and she agreed – not knowing that SHE would be unavailable this past week.

Every year the state department of health sends teams of inspectors to examine facilities such as Sky View. They come unannounced, look around at everything for a few days, make a report, and then leave. Our inspection comes in the summer, and is a cause of tension for the staff members. Well, the team showed up this past Tuesday and left on Friday, after a flurry of activity for the staff and even some of the residents. On Saturday I heard from a nurse that we passed the test with flying colors!

Meanwhile, instead of putting the project aside and waiting for Diane, I tried to move ahead on my own. How foolish! I have a hard time learning that I simply cannot do alone ANYTHING that has to do with a pile of papers. My fingers can no longer turn over the pages and keep them in order, and certainly I can't write manually. This is an area where I need help, but until it comes, I will practice not letting my lack, or the memories of past abilities, drag me down in the form of burdens. There are always reasons to practice being better, but be encouraged – Perfection awaits us in Heaven!

Monday, August 15, 2011. Last week I finished the service for September, almost 2 weeks before my deadline! As I said, that was because much of it was written in July before my computer broke down. I had a double motivation for working on the service: My friend Vallie Turner has invited me to be the speaker on Tuesday, September 13, for a prayer and praise group she helps to lead. My team and I were there last fall, and had a wonderful time, but I had not expected to be invited again; that is, I didn't think I would be physically able to go again. Vallie attends our Sky View services, and also visits me, so she was confident not only that I was strong enough to go, but that it was God's will for me to go. My team members happily assured me that they would be available to serve as my voice. From that time forward, my mind was filled with ideas for the 13th of September: I would piece together a beautiful patchwork quilt of a service from creative materials used here in Sky View this past year. Now you can guess what I meant when I said I had a double motivation for writing the Sky View service: I want to use some of it in Vallie's meeting as well!

Tuesday, August 16, 2011. Yesterday I turned over to Diane the material for the magazine I mentioned. My daughter Marty spent two sessions with me doing the things I cannot do: she handled papers and wrote instructions for the typists. Last evening I expected to spend some time working on Penny 24 when, at 4:30, in the middle of a rain storm, the lights went out! Fortunately, Sky View has emergency generators, so we were never COMPLETELY in the dark. It was 8:30 when the power came back on. At first there was some light coming in the windows, despite the dark clouds and rain. As it became gradually darker, one resident asked those of us gathered in the day room how we would be expected to sleep without any air conditioning. "The same way we slept before air conditioning was invented," I typed, and that made even the questioner laugh. But then the "crisis" was over, and all that remained was a story!

Friday, August 19, 2011. What a treat I had this afternoon: a 2-hour visit from my 20-year-old grandson John Kwiatkowski, from North Carolina! John drove his motorcycle all the way from NC to New York to spend a few days with his NY relatives before starting his junior year of college. His spirit of adventure also resided in his father David, who is our son. Just as soon as he graduated from college, David flew to San Francisco, CA, assembled a bicycle he had brought with him, and proceeded to pedal all the way back to NY! I can relate to the desire for adventure, for it was born in me, too. And I had my share! Now I am content to stay here while others travel. Just this week our grandson Evan Kwiatkowski, George's son and a May graduate from college, flew to Colorado to begin the next phase of his life. So now the grandchildren are scattering, just like some of our children did, and I did, and so on, back into history. It's all perfectly normal! Dear Lord, may my family members honor you wherever they go. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday, August 23, 2011. When I began this issue of my Penny journal, I certainly did not expect that I would be writing an entry about earthquakes – but I am! My friend Barbara came at 1:00 for her weekly visit. Part way into our time together I felt my chair begin to vibrate. That had never happened before! Since my chair was turned on, at first I thought something had gone wrong with the battery. But then, after a minute or so, the vibrating stopped and all was as usual. I asked Barbara if she had felt a vibration, and she said No, giving as a possible explanation for my story: "Maybe there was an earthquake!" Within minutes a nurse entered my room with the news that there had just been an earthquake in Virginia! Subsequent TV programs verified that the quake had indeed been felt in New York, and even as far north as eastern Canada!

Thursday, August 25, 2011. Diane Gitelson came into my room this afternoon with an armload of the new Sky View's Horizons, a happy sight indeed! She said it is being well received, adding that she already has two stories for the fall issue! Then she said one resident commented that we should do this once a month. We laughed heartily as we imagined the immense amount of work that would entail!

What rich meditations I have been having lately, brought on by world events superimposed by the earthquake and now an impending hurricane! When I heard that in Washington, D.C. the Washington Memorial and the National Cathedral both were damaged by the quake, I was reminded of the opening verses of Mark 13, where the disciples and Jesus were leaving the temple in Jerusalem a few days before Jesus was crucified. Acting like ordinary tourists, the disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

The reason I identify so much with this story is that in February, 1996, I was also in Jerusalem, and among the things I saw there were piles of truly MASSIVE stones! Surely, nothing built by humans lasts forever! Why should it surprise us if some buildings and monuments in our nation's capital are

damaged by an earthquake? All structures are subject to the amazingly strong forces that God has built into our universe. While we may rightly admire something that humans have made, we need to factor God into our praise, for the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and those who live in it. I can't begin to imagine how the workers of that time lifted the huge stones into place, and I can appreciate the effort and engineering intelligence that took, while also acknowledging the source of that skill. Once some men thought they could keep the body of Jesus in a tomb by sealing the big stone that had been rolled into place across the entrance and posting a guard. We all know that NOTHING could have kept Jesus in the tomb! God is so OTHER than what he has made. God could SPEAK those massive stones into place. THAT'S awesome!

Monday, September 12, 2011. Hurricane Irene came up the eastern seacoast from North Carolina to Maine, hitting our area on Sunday, August 28. Irene caused a HUGE amount of devastation, mainly as a result of flooding. Just yesterday I heard that the National Cathedral, already damaged by the earthquake, suffered more damage from the hurricane! Of course that brought to mind the previous meditation, as well as many verses and stories from the Bible. Do you remember what happened when Jesus and his disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee when a violent storm arose? In their terror, the disciples awakened Jesus, who was taking a nap. Jesus merely SPOKE to the waves, and the storm was over! Oh, the POWER of our God!

Here at Sky View the hurricane consisted of very heavy rain for several hours and some strong wind. Although many in the area lost electrical power, some for days, our facility did not. HOWEVER, on Monday about 4:00 in the afternoon, the power suddenly went out! There seemed to be no reason for this; what was going on? Just then over the speaker system came the explanation: Con Ed, our power supplier, had decided to turn off all electricity while they worked to remove fallen trees and branches from the downed wires in our area. The project was to take several hours. And so I spent a quiet evening in the Day Room – free from the noise (and the entertainment!) of TV sets – until the power was restored at about 8:00.

Yesterday I finished writing the service for tomorrow at Shrub Oak. I am excited about going out and mingling with others. To God be the glory.

Wednesday, September 14, 2011. What a wonderful time we all had at Praise Fellowship's monthly outreach meeting in Shrub Oak yesterday! I must give credit to my son George, who gathered papers for me at the start of this project; to Cliff Cullum, who handled all sorts of details for Vallie and for me, and was the moderator for the program; to my readers: Leo, Sharon, and Marilyn, who, along with Cliff, followed a complicated script and did it well; to Earl, our musician, who not only PLAYED the piano for us, but also SUPPLIED the piano by bringing his own deluxe keyboard upon finding out that there was no piano in the building where we were to meet; to John, who was in charge of the handout sheets, and to Carolyn, my faithful traveling companion. The Lord knows the details about what everyone did for the meeting. GOD was there, before, during, and after. We give all the compliments to him as a thank offering, and pray that the results may be eternal.

In addition, I must tell a story that took place in my room on Sunday afternoon, September 11, less than two days before the meeting. I am calling it –

OUR TIMES ARE IN GOD'S HANDS

After the Sky View service on Thursday, September 1, Cliff went away on vacation, returning on Thursday evening, the 8th. I had known about this, and had thoroughly expected to have the Praise Fellowship program all finished by the time he came for his regular visit at 4:15 on Friday. During that week Vallie had come to see me regarding the meeting and said she would also come Sunday after church. When Cliff came, I had to admit that I was not finished. Quickly he agreed to come any time on Sunday afternoon, and I picked 4:00. We did all we could on Friday, but had so much left over that we agreed to meet Saturday at 5:00 in addition to Sunday at 4. Saturday's work session

went well; I was especially pleased with the TIME we met, as my aide and nurse had come to provide my routine care around 4, so there were no interruptions.

Now it was Sunday. About 2:00 I sent an email to Cliff asking if he could come at 5 instead of 4, as that would be better for me. 4:00 came and so did my aide, but Cliff did not, so my plan was working well. Then at 4:15 Vallie arrived! Perfect timing! And then at 4:55, there was Cliff, happy to see both Vallie and me. "Did you get my email?" he asked. When I said no, he explained that he was already in Sky View's parking lot when he noticed that he had brought the wrong folder of papers with him. So he went back home, got the right folder, and arrived in my room just when I was expecting him! When he said he hadn't received my email, I sent him to my Mailbug to read it. How we all laughed when we all realized what God had done so that the 3 of us could be together at just the right time!

Then Cliff said, "I have a story to tell about what God did for me today!" Because of the vacation, the Praise meeting, and other commitments, Cliff was concerned about finding time to prepare for a Bible study he leads that was scheduled to resume at church Tuesday evening, after a summer break. Among the pastor's announcements in the morning was this: "The Tuesday Bible studies will be canceled this week since the church building will be used as a polling place for the primary elections on the 13th." Cliff took that as a special gift from God to him. Again laughter rang from my room, a combination of awe and sheer joy! Praise the Lord, who does all things well!

Friday, September 16, 2011. I must add a pleasant P.S. – a bonus! – to the Praise Fellowship event. I have mentioned before that I have allergies to both indoor and outdoor things. Indoor cleaning products and outdoor pollens and dust can make me quite sick. I try hard to avoid both. But this July my doctor put me on a daily dose of Claritin to protect me from my allergies. Several times since then strong cleaning agents were used around me and occasionally an aide opened a window for a while. I was pleased to notice that I did not react to these things as severely as before. But I continued to remain indoors – until Tuesday, a beautiful late summer day.

Carolyn, my traveling companion, and I spent about 20 minutes in front of Sky View in a semi-sheltered place while waiting for the Paratransit bus. Then in Shrub Oak, my reserved spot was next to a set of open double doors, admitting a gentle breeze for the entire 2 hours of the meeting! "This will surely let me know if the Claritin is working," I thought. But the biggest test came at the end. We waited outside for the bus for 45 minutes while the driver tried to locate the building. Gustly winds were blowing the entire time, pushing dust and debris into my face.

My whole excursion lasted 6 hours, which was really long for me. I was very tired when I arrived in Sky View, and mild signs of allergy problems were evident, but after a nap in my tilted chair, I felt much better. Now, 3 days later, I am happy to report that I did NOT get sick from extended time in the windy outdoors! BUT EVEN IF I HAD, I would have been glad I had served at the meeting on Tuesday.

Sunday, September 18, 2011. This morning while I was in bed, an aide came to visit me, saying she was coming with a heavy heart. Her favorite uncle died suddenly yesterday, she said. She was glad he had not suffered, but oh! how he would be missed, by the community as well as by the family. He was a Christian, she volunteered, a man who really could pray. After recalling the deaths of two other key persons in her family in the past year or so, she asked, "What do I say to those who are hurting? What do I tell them?" Knowing that her questions were not rhetorical, I motioned for my Lightwriter, which she placed in my lap. "Tell them you will meet again," I typed. She acknowledged that with a smile. I cleared the screen and wrote, "He is still alive." She replied, "Yes, he is alive in our hearts." I shook my head and pointed upward. "In Heaven," she guessed, and I nodded, typing, "He has just moved." She absorbed that for a moment and then said, "I feel better now." I said I would pray for her, and then she left – to be a blessing to her family.

I have mixed emotions about this story. Certainly I was glad to help my sister in Christ find peace. I am sure God placed me in Sky View for moments such as these. What concerns me is the relatively low impact the teaching about Heaven has on believers that I meet, when the issue of death is involved. Simple, basic truths such as I shared with the aide have been a big help to many in my experience through the years. Why weren't these truths in place BEFORE death was confronted, I have wondered. And is it fitting for us to tell God when "enough is enough"? Another believer besides the aide proposed the same idea to me a couple weeks ago. My thought is that our God knows what he is doing, and he never makes mistakes! I can't IMAGINE asking God what he thinks he's doing. What do you, my readers, think about these things?

Saturday, September 24, 2011. Another week is ending, and somehow I feel like I am on the brink of something, but I don't know what. Change seems to be in the air, and I feel an excitement within. For one thing, autumn has arrived, bringing with it the anticipation of the fall colors I enjoy so much. Baseball season is ending; football games have begun. Also, I am almost finished with the October service, almost a week early. The topic is Hope; maybe that's what I am feeling inside! In addition to the new pieces I wrote for the Praise Fellowship service, I composed another creative piece titled Hope in Christ, which led to my thinking about creating similar works on other subjects. I look forward to starting on this project, and now I have time!

Two other things may be contributing to my feeling of well-being tonight. One concerns my health. My breathing had been raspy or several days, then yesterday I had a scratchy throat, accompanied by some severe coughing spells. I asked my nurse if there were anything I could take by request for my scratchy throat, and she, in turn, called my doctor. He prescribed all sorts of medications, including antibiotics. Today the raspiness and scratchy throat are gone, and my coughing is back to normal. In addition, some other symptoms that have popped up recently have abated in the past few days.

Add to this an offer from my friend Maxine: she is willing to come to Sky View to do what she calls nitty-gritty jobs for me. She loves moving things about, organizing them, keeping them neat. I know she and I can work well together, for she was one of the people from church who helped me get ready to move from our house into Drum Hill. Now all that remains is for me to make a list of chores and for us to set a date!

Now wrap up all of the above with the constant awareness that God is here, and that I am here at this time by his appointment, and I ask you: Is it any wonder that I feel an excitement within?

Friday, September 30, 2011. The end of another quarter has arrived! Earlier this month I decided to end this issue in September, following my usual schedule, even though it seemed that #24 would be considerably shorter than other issues. Then this week I wrote another fairly long poem that I would like to share with you, especially since this issue has no poetry thus far. So Penny 24 may not be so noticeably short after all! Here is the story behind the poem:

My friend Vallie Turner came to visit me after church last Sunday. We always have such a good time encouraging each other in the Lord. Both of us have had awesome experiences with God, including a rush of wonderful thoughts, causing us to ask what they were for. The question came to me in the 1980s and 90s, when Scripture songs kept coming to my mind as I read the Bible. I wrote them down and reviewed them often, knowing that the Lord was calling my attention to these verses for a reason. Before long, I was using the songs in the various ministries in which I was involved. "You should get these published," was a frequent comment, causing me to wonder if my songs were just for me and my friends or if God meant them to have a wider distribution. At that time I understood that God continues to be SO creative today that he could very well lavish a set of songs on me and do the same to thousands upon thousands of people worldwide, all unique and beautiful, suited to the style of the people writing them down – without duplicating a single tune! Only a small fraction of what God inspires today gets preserved for the next generations, but the rest is not wasted even if it remains within the recipient, for it transforms that person and brings a glow!

In the days after Vallie's visit, I had a strong desire to write a poem about overflowing with love, joy, hope, and thankfulness. The poem I wrote was NOT the one I had imagined, but I like it, and with it, I will close Penny 24. Romans 15:13. Verna.

AN OVERFLOWING LIFE

*By Verna Kwiatkowski. Sky View. After
a conversation with Vallie. A prayer.*

Lord, I would like to lead an overflowing life,
One that is more than just for me.
Fill me with your Spirit, Lord. Banish petty strife,
And help me to see eternity, my Lord,
Help me to see eternity.

Creatively, David was a man who overflowed.
It began when he was tending his sheep.
Thoughts welled up inside him until he fairly glowed,
And he knew they were not just his to keep, my Lord,
He knew they were not just his to keep.

So faithfully he wrote his words for all to share,
And reviewed them to keep his mind sharp,
As I read them today, his music fills the air,
And I see him strumming on his harp, my Lord,
I see him strumming on his harp.

Psalms came to him while he was hiding in a cave,
Pursued, and weary to the bone.
In dire circumstances he called on you to save,
And he found his rest in you alone, my Lord,
He found his rest in you alone.

I can see why you said he was after your own heart.
He put you first in his life! In everything,
He always took a lesser role, knowing well his part,
For you were his Shepherd and his King, my Lord,
You were his Shepherd and his King.

You taught him more than he wrote as spiritual food.
Not one lesson he absorbed was a waste,
For when he says "Taste and see! The Lord is good!"
Oh, I long to have another taste, my Lord,
I long to have another taste.

Lord, through this poem you have granted my plea.
Oh, Lord, you are always coming through!
Connecting me with David was a glimpse of eternity!
All my thoughts I dedicate to you, my Lord,
My thoughts I dedicate to you.

Amen.

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