

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 25

(OCTOBER – DECEMBER, 2011)

Thursday, October 6, 2011. Hello, everyone! Welcome to the 25th edition of my journal, which I began writing 6 years ago during my last couple months in Drum Hill, the senior living facility where I resided before moving into Sky View, my current home. As I reflect on this, I can see how important it was that I start writing the Penny essays just when I did, so they would encompass my entire nursing home experience, including the actual move. Six years ago I knew and accepted the fact that I would have to move; I just didn't know where or when. A few days before Christmas in 2005 my children located a room for me at Sky View, in Croton-on-Hudson, and I agreed to transfer on December 29. The details of this event are written in an essay titled "A Room with a View." And here I am, in the same room, happy and content, rejoicing in God, my Savior, whose timing is always perfect!

Friday, October 7, 2011. I wonder if any of my long time readers recognized that I began this issue on the first Thursday of the month? That means it was the day we had Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends, the monthly worship service that I write for a team of friends to deliver here at Sky View. The theme of yesterday's service was HOPE, a very uplifting subject. What a pleasure!

At Drum Hill I conducted a weekly worship service. Fond memories are flowing through my mind as I write this! I could still walk (with a walker) and talk when the Drum Hill programs started. My body has changed, but one thing remains the same: God, who was my strength and hope in Drum Hill, is still my strength and hope here at Sky View. What a mighty God we serve!

Wednesday, October 12, 2011. Yesterday was a perfect fall day weather-wise here in the northeast: warm, sunny, hardly any breeze. It was the perfect setting for an adventure, and that is just what I had! With my friend Carolyn Burke as my traveling companion, I went on what has become my annual shopping trip to Jefferson Valley Mall, 2 miles from where we lived in Yorktown Heights for more than 38 years. The Paratransit bus drove all over familiar places, coming within a block of our former Mead Street abode. Since there were others on the bus that needed to be taken home, the ride was twice as long as it would have been otherwise, but I don't regret a minute of it. All the way to Mt. Kisco we went, around the reservoir and streams, giving me the chance to see the trees beginning to turn color, and lovely chrysanthemums everywhere!

At the Mall Carolyn and I had plenty of time to shop for the few items on my list. Most of all, I wanted a certain style of slippers. We looked through rows of shoes and slippers in my size and tried on a few. Then, just when it seemed that our search was going to be futile, a salesclerk whom Carolyn knew came over to see if we needed any help. As soon as she heard what we wanted, she headed to a section of the store we had not explored, and came back with just the right style in 3 different colors! They fit me well, so I picked my favorite color, and a sale was made. At the computer a surprise awaited us: it said the slippers were now on sale for \$10 less! As we talked following the sale, I flashed a message on my Lightwriter screen from the machine's memory: God bless you. What I especially remember is the clerk's reaction. She was SO happy with the message! I have found through the years that people really want to talk about God in everyday situations, and determined that I would do what I could to facilitate that desire. I really did feel God's involvement in our lives in the shoe store, and I was thankful!

As I ponder this story a day later, I especially cherish the truth that, with all the memories that were stirred up yesterday – and I made no attempt to subdue them – I found no desire within me to return to the way things were. I am content to be where and how I am today, and that makes me glad!

Saturday, October 22, 2011. Some things have happened that I want to record in this journal before going on to other writing projects. A week ago I was sitting in my room at about 8:30 in the evening when a series of noises made me look out the window into the darkness. For the next 20 minutes I was privileged to watch a glorious display of fireworks – in October! What an unexpected surprise!

Also, my friend Maxine came to do “nitty-gritty” jobs for me! Now I have a closet, two drawers, and a bathroom shelf that are well organized, a pleasure for both of us. Maxine plans to come when she can until the job is done, and then maintain her work. Already she comes to help with our monthly service when we need her. There are many ways to serve the Lord!

A visitor told me recently that if anyone had a reason for self-pity, I did. He went on to say, “A little self-pity is allowed, I think, as long as it doesn’t become obsessive.” I shook my head. “I can see that you disagree – VIGOROUSLY!” he said. “Not one drop of self-pity,” I typed. Doesn’t God have the right to do what he wants with his dearly loved children, whom he bought with his own blood? And shouldn’t his servants serve him wherever he chooses, without complaint? It makes sense to me to answer both questions with a willing yes, leaving no room for self-pity. He pondered all of this, and, when he was leaving, he thanked me. I wonder: What do you think about this subject?

This afternoon I had out-of-state company: Levi and Helen Ziegler stopped in by appointment on their way from Pennsylvania to Massachusetts. Levi is my first cousin once removed; he was a first cousin of my father, William Ziegler. Levi is also a pastor, so we have much in common. Leo was also here for the visit. He had been getting to know Levi and Helen through email for the past year and a half as he served as a prayer partner through their son Robert’s serious illness and recovery. It was a refreshing visit for all of us!

Tuesday, October 25, 2011. Leo just left Sky View after usual daily visit. He won’t be here again until Wednesday, November 2. For him, it’s VACATION TIME, and I share his joy! Leo is going to North Carolina by train, to spend some well-scheduled time with our son David, his wife Dana, and their 3 children, all college age and beyond. Then next Tuesday he will board the train again for the trip home. Wednesday, Lord willing, he will come to see me, full of news, all of which I will be eager to hear!

Friday, October 28, 2011. All month I have been thinking about the early signs of my disease, primary lateral sclerosis (PLS). Usually I have considered an electrical type shock in one leg that made me stumble as the first sign that something was wrong. That took place in May, 2002. In July of that year I began falling. But when our son Paul was visiting from California this April, he reminded me that he saw me have an unexplained fall in California in October, 2001. He was right! Ten years ago Leo and I flew to CA to visit our son and his family less than a month after the terrorist attack on our country that involved the World Trade Center towers. Little did I know that this would be my last trip West! While we were there, Paul drove us up into the mountains he loves so much, stopping to let us get out from time to time. Once as I extended my right foot to step out of the van, the bone in my leg seemed to turn into rubber; instead of supporting my weight, my leg “collapsed,” and down I went. Later, I came to know this as one of two kinds of PLS falls. The other kind came when my right foot planted itself on the surface, refusing to lift as I was walking along. This is the type that led to my broken hip in the shoe store.

This reverie has only proven to me that I will never know the first sign of my disease, for other memories of falling are surfacing as I write. One incident took place perhaps 8 or 10 years before the one in CA. I was heading toward a clothing store at my usual pace when suddenly I thought, “Oh, my! I’m going down!” And there was nothing I could do to prevent my falling into the flowerbed at the edge of the sidewalk, soiling the long, winter coat I was wearing. That fall was also to the right, with

no external reason for the fall. However, I blamed my shoes, for I recalled that when I had a previous fall, I was wearing the same shoes. I have no recollection of that earlier fall except I must have had it, for when I got home from the store, I threw those shoes away.

Saturday, October 29, 2011.

OCTOBER SNOWSTORM

*By Verna Kwiatkowski. Sky View. During
a snowstorm on October 29, 2011.*

The view from my window is strange today.
The seasons are wrestling as though in play.
The sights and sounds are all those of winter,
While my calendar says that it's still October!

Winter seems to be winning! A cold, wet snow,
Piling onto trees with leaves still in autumn glow,
Is causing branches to snap, and in their rapid fall,
They cause all sorts of damage, affecting one and all.

Aided by snowplows, the traffic just inches along,
People eager to be at home, where they belong.
Living here at Sky View, I am thankful and content,
Glad to be cared for in such a loving environment.

Tomorrow is another day, and If the reports are true,
Autumn will shake off winter for another week or two.
But winter will be back! On this we can depend,
For God has said earth's rhythms will last until the end.

A promise God gave Noah after the flood:

*"As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease."*

– Genesis 8:22

Monday, October 31, 2011. I plan to submit the above poem for publication in the fall issue of Sky View's Horizons. I am still involved in the production of this quarterly magazine, but not to the extent I was for the summer issue. I told Diane, the staff member in charge of this project, that I needed to cut back, as I don't have the stamina to do that job and my own writing as well, and she understood.

By the way, this snowstorm, which affected the whole northeast, was far more than just a freak of nature; it was an absolute DISASTER, with as much damage as from hurricane Irene this summer. The fact that the leaves were still on the trees allowed the storm to cause such devastation. In our area we had about a foot of snow, and today one million homes are still without electricity due to

fallen branches. Many schools were closed today, public transportation was limited, and some towns banned Halloween activities, due to danger from live wires. These towns will reschedule Halloween later in the week. Who could have imagined such a thing?

Today I had 2 visitors I had never seen before. They arrived in a cage carried by my daughter Marty. That's right, they were 2 little kittens, Jackie and Toby, the latest additions to Marty and Ed Ford's family. Their names have significance: since they were acquired in October, Jackie got her name from Jack-o-lantern, and her brother's name came from the month itself: Oc-TOB-er. Marty closed my door, opened the cage, and there they were! For the next 20 minutes they lived up their reputation, the one I had already heard from Marty and Leo. Sleek and agile, they are anything but fragile! They are fearless and acrobatic, yet somehow not reckless; you can almost see their thought process as they contemplate their next jump. Both are affectionate, prone to purr, and cute as can be, but most of all, they are entertaining! Jackie and Toby, now 3 months old, had me laughing aloud, and left me with many memories that will make me smile in the time to come

Thursday, November 10, 2011. As I sit at my computer today, my mind is recalling two wonderful events from a week ago. Prior to the service, for it was the first Thursday, I attempted to calm my excitement by looking out of the window in my room. The vast expanse of sky was free of clouds and rather monotone, in a watercolor sort of way. All of a sudden a large black bird, looking bigger than the crows that sometimes sit on the ledge outside my window, came soaring into view, putting on quite a show for me. "How easily he flies!" I marveled. "His wings are hardly moving at all, yet he swoops, lifts, and turns all over the place!" Suddenly three other birds of the same kind joined the first one, moving about as if choreographed. By then I knew what was happening. Years ago, when we lived in our house in Yorktown Heights, I was privileged to hear a command performance of the Symphony of the Birds, which I enjoyed so much and sometimes replay in my head. I realized that what I was now seeing was the Ballet of the Birds, another production by God for the enjoyment of his children.

The entire ballet lasted about ten minutes, and had a total cast of about twelve birds. At no time during the performance did any other kind of bird fly on the stage where the dance was going on; it was obvious that the theater had been reserved. The jet black costumes of the dancers stood out in stark contrast to the pale blue backdrop chosen by the Master Producer. The dancers, which probably WERE crows, looked HUGE with their wings fully out-stretched! The birds were well-rehearsed; their precision was marvelous to watch! I did not see the birds that were backstage; they were out of sight, getting ready for their next entrance from the wings. Nor can I remember the sequence of scenes, except for the first two, which I have already described. The entire ensemble danced a few times, and the rest of the ballet was danced by the star, either alone or in the company of others.

And then it was over. The ending was just as clear-cut as the start had been. My heart flooded with joy that carried over to and through our service at 2:00, which was the second event. I was aware that this service was especially creative. It had such a happy theme: "Overflowing," and contained a new poem titled "An Overflowing Life" (the one with which I closed Penny 24), and a Scripture reading called "A Shower of Overflowing." I felt God's pleasure that day, as we shared our creative works with each other, and oh, it was wonderful! The birds were happy, my team was happy, and so was the audience at our service. The joy of the Lord is contagious!

Monday, November 21, 2011. Yesterday was a transitional day for our family, and it went well. The special services that we give at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter were always listed on the Sky View activities calendar as given by "Verna and Family," referring to the fact that George and his sons, along with Leo, delivered the services that George had prepared from my materials. Now that his sons are scattered around the country, George felt it was time to retire the "and Family" portion of

our name. I agreed. He then contacted my team of Friends, most of whom were not only available, but also very willing to take part. And so yesterday at 2:30 we had our first Thanksgiving Service with Verna and Friends.

A note to George and Janet's sons Andrew, Evan, and Eric: God will remember your labor of love as you took part in the services for so many years, and so will we. Thank you! Serve the Lord with gladness wherever you are, all your lives. Look forward. The best is yet to come!

This service was PACKED with Thanksgiving, with all the songs, readings, and prayers contributing to the theme. George likes when I write a new meditation for the special services; this time I compiled "A Shower of Thanksgiving" from the Scriptures, and when it was read, God's Word DID fall on us like a gentle rain, encouraging us to grow. When the service was over, I felt as if I had truly celebrated the holiday; there was nothing special left for me to do on Thursday. My soul was satisfied!

Tuesday, November 29, 2011. In the poem "October Snowstorm," I said (tongue in cheek), "Autumn will shake off winter for another week or two," but it has done far better than that. Winter made a weak attempt at a comeback in November with a few cold days, but autumn triumphed, with record-breaking warmth these last few days. Now the trees are bare of leaves, and we are back on standard time. Let winter begin!

Tuesday, December 6, 2011. In the past few weeks I have thought of many things that I planned to write in Penny 25, but didn't do it. Where are those thoughts now? Does it matter that they were never typed? I feel like I am preparing for the time when my body won't allow me to type. That time IS coming, unless I die soon, or the trumpet sounds, and Jesus takes us all Home. Besides the closing down that I am experiencing, there are many residents here whose neurological diseases are more advanced than mine. I see their no longer functioning hands, and make a mental note. One woman in particular also can barely speak anymore, yet I know full well that her mind is still sharp. I wonder what she does with HER thoughts? In the poem "An Overflowing Life," I said that while David wrote down many of his thoughts, so that we could feast on them as spiritual food, I assumed he did not write down ALL of his thoughts. I also said that any thoughts he had of God but did not write down WERE NOT WASTED; instead, they were absorbed by David as though eaten and digested, resulting in his personal growth. That's certainly not a waste!

Thursday, December 15, 2011. I have been doing a lot of writing lately, some of it for others. I told a friend today that I feel like I'm still working. That was a silly statement to make, because, of course, I AM still working! I am an ambassador for Christ, and one does not retire from that job! My work is interesting and varied. A man from the housekeeping staff, for example, asked me if I would write a thank you speech for him. His whole family is going back to their native India where he and his wife will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary at a party given by his children. A few days ago I gave him a speech that he intends to read at the festive occasion. Glad to help!

Marty helped me get out a Christmas mailing, a copy of which will be on my website. Also, I have been occupied with the layout and editing of Sky View's Horizons. Fortunately, I had the help of Lisa, our social work intern for this year. She was very good. I look forward to working with her on the next issue so we can hone her skills as an editor, building on what she learned this time.

A week ago Andrea, my reflexologist, asked me if I would write a testimonial for her website. I wrote it today, knowing I would see her tonight. She was so pleased with my story, calling it a gift. All of it is true; you can imagine what strong emotions rose within me as I typed! Here it is:

For the past four-and-a-half years Andrea Weyant has been my reflexologist, coming to my room in Sky View's nursing home in Croton-on-Hudson, NY almost weekly the whole time. My introduction to reflexology occurred perhaps 30 years ago and was very favorable. My parents had begun having regular treatments as part of a natural health routine they followed. Over the years, when our family visits and their appointments coincided, I would go with them and have my feet worked on, too. There I saw the possibilities of benefitting from reflexology.

Andrea entered my life about 20 years ago when she enrolled in a class I was teaching. When the class ended, we went our separate ways, though we heard about each other from time to time through mutual friends. In 2007 Andrea found out that I was living in a nursing home, and offered to give me a reflexology session as a gift. I was delighted with the renewed contact both with Andrea and with reflexology. Plans for weekly sessions began right away.

Along with other minor things, I have a progressive neurological disease, for which there is no cure. It's hard to point to specific ways that reflexology has helped me, although I do believe it has. Here are two things I DO know for sure:

1. I enjoy Andrea! She exudes peace and confidence. She is absolutely certain that what she is doing will benefit me. She works with precision; I know she has a plan.
2. The time I have with Andrea is the most relaxing time of my week. She considers it an honor if I fall asleep while she works on me, which I usually do! That's special!

Sunday, December 18, 2011. On Friday I began writing verses that could be sung to the tune of "Just As I Am," a hymn I plan to use in our January service. I love the way that hymn expresses the process of coming to Christ for salvation. My verses, which I thought would be added on to the end of "Just As I Am," express what happens next, after the person has had a solid conversion. Two stanzas were written by the time Cliff came for his weekly visit. Since he is our song leader, I showed him my verses, which he sang easily, giving me his wholehearted approval. Then yesterday two more stanzas came to me, making mine a completely new poem, taking a person from salvation to Heaven. Leo, who arrived just as I finished copying the whole poem, was the first to sing it in its entirety. His reaction was priceless! He agrees with me that this is a hymn that could be sung at a communion service. What do you think?

IN CHRIST I STAND

*By Verna Kwiatkowski. A Sky View poem.
A response to salvation. May be sung to the
tune of Just As I Am, alone or as a sequel.*

In Christ I stand, forgiven of sin,
Transformed and clean, without, within,
You declared your love, my heart to win,
Oh Lamb of God, I'm yours, I'm yours.

Bought with a price that you provide,
I now go forth, close by your side,
Content to know, whate'er betide,
Oh Lamb of God, I'm yours, I'm yours.

I am not my own; to Christ I belong.

He fills my life with joy and song!
With my eyes on him, I can't go wrong –
Oh Lamb of God, I'm yours, I'm yours.

When I arrive at Heav'n's resting place,
Renewed, revived, and all by grace,
With joy I'll say to him, face to face,
Oh Lamb of God, I'm yours, I'm yours.

Written for the January, 2012 service at Sky View.
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Saturday, December 31, 2011. These past two weeks have certainly been eventful! The autumn issue of Sky View's Horizons was finally distributed last week, bringing favorable comments. It is filled with positive articles and uplifting thoughts. Already we have some submissions for the next issue!

One week ago, on Christmas Eve, we held our Christmas Service with Verna and Friends, and oh, it satisfied my soul! The music was outstanding! For most songs, a trio of musicians accompanied us: Earl Brown on the piano, George on the cello, and Bill Harris using his strong, distinctive voice to lead us. On two of the carols our grandson Evan joined the others with his trumpet!

As I conclude another issue of my journal, I want to say something about the people who attended the service. Amy and Sal, the weekend activities staff, did a good job of bringing residents to the living room, and I appreciated that. Some came on their own power, like my new friend Marilyn, who wheels her own chair, and residents who can still walk, like Ruth and Lynn. Besides the people among whom I have lived for 6 years now (as of December 29th), there were many in the audience from the "outside," each bringing along memories that could have been overwhelming, had I not learned to hand to God bouquets of gratitude as soon as good things happen.

On this particular day, besides my regular team and George's whole family (wife Janet and sons Eric, Evan and Andrew), the following came to share in the joy: Bill (the singer, and the man who replaced me as pastor of Community Church when I retired); two members of his congregation who wanted to meet me; Debbie (a member of the congregation when I was pastor); dear, faithful Vallie; Kathleen (whom I met through Vallie); Richard and Marilyn (both of whom had visited me the day before, ending a 2 year separation); Fred and Maj-Britt Lyons (Janet's parents); and Peter (whom I recently met through Anthony, pastor of the Lutheran church here in Croton, who conducts a service here on the 3rd Thursday of the month). To God be the glory – great things he has done!

The Dyers arrived from Massachusetts today to spend the New Year weekend with us. On that very pleasant note, I will wish you the blessings of love, joy, and peace throughout 2012, and bring this issue to a close.

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Verna Kwiatkowski

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