

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 26

(JANUARY – MARCH, 2012)

Saturday, January 7, 2012. Hello, my readers! Poised here at my computer, I have just spent a few moments wondering whether anyone would ever read my opening words of greeting. Before it is made available to you, three more months will have to pass in which I am able to keep a journal and get it ready for you. None of us knows for sure what will happen tomorrow, much less three months from now! I am due to get a new feeding tube soon. I've had this one almost nine months, and it certainly is worn out. I am always glad when the exchanges are over.

Our first service of the new year was held on **Thursday, January 5**, and a happy service it was! There were many different readers, who took part as solos, duets, and trios: Cliff, Leo, Frank, George, Sharon, Barbara, and Ruth – our resident friend who occasionally reads with us. I had given her a copy of my new poem "In Christ I Stand," and was impressed with how she read it. Ruth said, "That's because I read from the bottom of my heart!" It was then that I decided to add her to the program, having her read the poem just before we sang it for the first time (to the tune of "Just As I Am"). Our musical combo of Earl and George guided us through some hearty singing that day, enhanced by other Friends who were in the audience: Vallie, Mary, Kathleen, Terry, and John, who was also handing out song sheets to people as they arrived.

It is quite an emotional experience for me to hear my poems sung as hymns. I wonder how Fanny Crosby and the other hymn writers felt when in my position? At one time their hymns were new, too! I feel a kinship with them, as well as with the musicians whose tunes I use. I am sure that God was somehow involved in the writing of my hymn / poems, now five in number. Perhaps many years from now my hymns will be sung by individuals and congregations who know nothing about the woman who wrote the words. That would be fine with me!

Thursday, January 19, 2012. Yesterday was the day I was scheduled to get a new feeding tube at Phelps Memorial Hospital. All details fell into place beautifully, and I was so grateful to the Sky View staff and to God. I had been watching the weather report, and saw that Wednesday was predicted to be dry, cold, and blustery; again I gave thanks. After I was on the stretcher, my aide tucked my winter jacket over me and covered my head with a hat. A blanket covering me from shoulder to foot was the final preparation for my venture into the January air. I was snug indeed! As soon as the ambulette crew got me outdoors, a strong gust of wind blew the blanket right off, as if determined that, for a few minutes at least, I would experience winter. And I did!

In the Emergency Room a big surprise awaited me. Dr. Martin came at the appointed time to examine me and my tube. He looked at the paper containing my questions and concerns, and answered each one. In his opinion, the condition of the tube did not warrant its exchange yet, contrary to what my nurses thought. The critical point was that it had a minimal problem with blockage. One other factor came into play: Dr. Martin indicated that he was not eager to give me anesthetics, yet the kind of tube that can be exchanged at bedside gave me a lot of trouble last year. I was so glad for this informative conversation! I give credit to God for what happened next: I somehow remembered that the tab that closes the end of the tube was about to break off. Sky View didn't have the replaceable part for my size tube. Dr. Martin not only replaced the mechanism, but also gave me an extra one for the next time I need it!

Some people are curious about how I processed this incident. As I indicated in the January 7 entry, I do find that tube changes give me a certain amount of stress, even though I know that God is with me. I don't scold myself for being a bit apprehensive; my understanding of Jesus in Gethsemane

helps here. As for the fact that the procedure was postponed, “my times are in God’s hands.” I am not upset about what happened; rather, I have given thanks and made “the choice to rejoice.” *

* This quotation is from my poem by the same name. It reminds me of some encouraging news I received recently from my friend Anthony, pastor of a church here in Croton. He said some of the women of his congregation, among them one who has cancer, have been reading my poems, especially “The Choice to Rejoice,” and have decided to put them into practice. All glory to God, who still inspires his people for his good purposes!

Saturday, January 21, 2012. What a difference a day makes! I am thinking especially of the weather as I write this. Yesterday was dry, although cold and a bit windy. In Maryland my brother Bob and his wife Esther chose that perfect day to board Amtrak and come pay me a visit. What a good time we had, both sharing memories and getting to know each other and our family better. Since I am 13 years older than my brother, there are always new things to discover.

During the night I was awakened by a snowplow, letting me know that a well-predicted snowstorm had arrived, the first since the strange storm we had on October 29. The view from my window suggests that we got about 6 inches before the storm passed over us this afternoon. The weather reports on TV say this should all be gone by Monday when the temperatures are supposed to be in the 50s!

Sunday, January 29, 2012. Yesterday I finished writing the service for February 2, amazed, as usual, at the fresh thoughts that God continues to give me from his Word for these events. Sometimes I feel like I am typing from dictation, an experience both delightful and humbling. The topic for this service is love, and the passage I was pondering was John 13:1-17, where Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. Years ago I set this whole story to music, so it could be acted out while sung. That means the story is within me, where I could meditate on it anytime, and frequently I did just that.

I think back on the life of Jesus and remember how many times he shocked the disciples by his behavior. He mingled, talked, and ate with all sorts of people: women, foreigners, the sick, tax collectors, even those labeled as “sinners.” Jesus also gave a very liberal interpretation to laws that they thought were ironclad, and paid scant attention to the traditions of the elders, except to expose them for what they were. It is not easy to completely change your mindset, yet Jesus gave his disciples no choice: if they wanted to be his true disciples, they had to think as he did. The kingdom of God is vast and inclusive, not narrow and restrictive. They, like Jesus, needed to be free of all kinds of prejudice.

On the night before he died, Jesus had one more lesson to teach his followers. This lesson would further stretch their minds so they could see the full extent of his love. That’s why he washed the disciples’ feet, over their protests that such work was not appropriate for their Teacher and Lord. Jesus did not mind doing tasks that some considered menial – and neither should we! No one is too important to serve where there’s a need. Nor is any decent, honest work to be looked down upon; it can all be done for the glory of God!

I’m thinking with gratitude now of all the people who have literally washed my feet during my life, beginning with my parents, and including those who ritually washed them as part of our Love Feast in the Church of the Brethren during my growing up years. While living at Drum Hill in 2004 I lost the ability to wash my own feet. Friends, women from my church, and then aides came to help me bathe. Here in Sky View, since December, 2005, my cleanliness has been totally in the hands of aides, DOZENS of aides, both male and female. Besides washing and dressing us, these special people also take care of our toileting needs. I am full of praise for all men and women who take on the work of an aide, whether as a profession or in caring for a family member or a neighbor who

needs help. I include here my Grandma Ziegler, who gladly tended her multi-handicapped daughter Sara for over fifty years. What an example for me!

So to all those who took care of me in the past, and to the aides taking care of me now, to all who anywhere are taking care of others, please know that your job is a very important one. Don't be discouraged! Take heart and continue on. God knows your labor of love; remember: Jesus washed the disciples' feet! And THANK YOU!

On another subject: On **Sunday, January 22, 2012**, my daughter Marty brought her 2 kittens, Jackie and Toby, to my room for their second visit. This time they arrived in two cages, as they had grown too large to travel in one. You may recall that on their first visit both kittens energetically explored my room, providing us with lots of laughs. Things were different this time. Toby came out of his cage and made himself right at home. Jackie, who is much smaller than her brother, squeezed herself under my bureau as quickly as she could and hid there during most of the visit. From time to time her sweet face would peer out from under the bureau, bringing pleasure to all, including Vallie, who was here when Marty arrived.

I couldn't help thinking of human siblings as I watched the kittens. The same family can have children with a wide range of personalities that may change as they age. Marty had another possible explanation for the difference in Jackie: she had not enjoyed the ride from her home in Peekskill to mine in Croton. She could have been hiding from stress and fear, rather than from timidity. Toby and Marty both tried to coax Jackie out, with Toby, despite his size, even joining her briefly. Finally Marty removed the bottom bureau drawer, which exposed the little kitten, backed into a corner. Soon she was in Marty's loving arms, receiving comforting caresses.

That, however, is not the end of the story! Jackie broke loose, and in a FLASH was under the bookcase adjacent to the bureau. I was both surprised and amused by this turn of events, for I attributed human thinking to her: "I'm not going under the bureau again. That's not safe. I'll try the bookcase instead." And that's where she stayed until the visit's end. Marty and Vallie, working as a team, ultimately won, of course, to Jackie's chagrin!

Monday, February 13, 2012. On Saturday afternoon I went downstairs to the Main Living Room (MLR) to take part in an activity listed on our calendar as Word Game. This time we were going to play Word Breakdown, my favorite of the word games. Amy, our activity director on the weekends, chooses a very long word from which we make smaller words using only the letters found in the original. Amy has found a way to make the game fun by removing some of the competition from it. She gives us each a sheet of paper on which the word has been written and allows us time to begin making our own lists. I sit next to her so she can write on my paper the words I type on my Light-writer. (I challenge myself extra by listing only words with 5 letters or more.)

After awhile Amy begins compiling our words on a master list, going around the table, adding one word from us at a time. If we think of another word as we play, we may write it on our papers. This is really a group effort. We admire (or challenge) each other's words, but there are no individual winners. Instead, Amy announces how many words we got collectively. We congratulate ourselves, then return to our rooms.

On Saturday we ended with about 125 words, including many with 3 or 4 letters. I was impressed by the words that others found, particularly those on Emma's list. Emma, who is nearly 92, lives near me on the 4th floor. Inspired by her, I decided to give myself one final challenge: could I find 100 words of 5 letters or more if I had unlimited time? This would include the ones I could recall from others in the MLR. Several hours later my list far exceeded my expectations, totaling 165! Here they are. (NO, I do NOT expect you to read the whole list! The story continues after the words.)

radiogoniometer a ee ii ooo
rr d g n m t 5 or more letters Goal: 100

radio meter tenor miner minor origami genii grant garment orate
groom meteor organ groan moron maroon idiot median media regain
dragon green greed greet drone motor roamed grain great grate
idiom enter renter errand errant magnet rotor remote rooted gnome
tired grade argon trade groin admit minted egret dream timid
remit amend range ranged mange mango ranger danger tiger roomed
meant doing grime goner moaner miter niter dragnet inter interim
intern indigo random erred eared aired marred gained train trained
tinge granted ornate ingrate retired nomad margin orange merit order
gemini greater retire groaned toned toner image imagine imagined modern (100)

timed nadir digit agent triad merge mined drain merged groomed
marooned regained grated demote denote interned interred mired mania gender
ringed tined region giant trainer granite adorn mortar ignite teamed
among inert geared tremor gored meeting teeming dreaming motion timing
retiring airing aired taming mating aimed aiming earring inertia demoting
triage ordering erring rooming rooting trading roaming motoring meriting reign
rained mentor rented demon trend (165)

Eager to share my accomplishment, for the first time I went into Emma's room with my list and this note:

Hello, Emma. I thought you would be interested in the results of a challenge I gave myself: to take Saturday's word and see how many words I could find with 5 letters or more. I stopped at 165! I know some of your great words are not on the list.

Verna 413

On Sunday Emma came into my room for the first time, bringing me additional words:

tender torment torrent deter doormat dormant trader garden moored armor
arming armed meager dragoon (14)

Together we got 179 words! Emma said, "You and I could continue to find words if we so desired." I smiled and nodded, knowing this was true. But for us, this game is over now. What remains is a story and a budding new friendship, plus the benefits of having stimulated our brains. That's a lot!

Friday, February 17, 2012. TRIPLE EXPOSURE. By putting a heading above my January 29 entry, I was able to use it as a note of appreciation for my aides, some of whom were really touched by the message. The heading said:

For my aides:

AN ENTRY FROM MY JOURNAL

From Verna Kwiatkowski 413

Then a couple days ago Diane, our social worker, came into my room to talk about the winter edition of Sky View's Horizons. When she asked if I had any contributions to make, I had her read the thank you note for my aides. She heartily approved the article for inclusion in Horizons. I changed only one

word, making the title say **For our aides**, and it was ready to go! I didn't know when I typed that entry that it would get triple exposure, but I'm glad! May many be encouraged by reading it, perhaps even you!

Sunday, February 26, 2012. This entry has been on my mind for over a week, during which I took care of a more pressing need: preparing the service for March 1. That was completed on Friday. Yesterday I handled some business matters, one of which included a delightful visit with my friend Emma, in her room. Then we both headed downstairs for another game of Word Breakdown (more later). This morning, while still in bed, I heard two sermons on TV that convinced me I **MUST** write this story. And so, in obedience to God, and giving him the glory, I begin my article, titled:

WHITNEY HOUSTON'S HOMEGOING

When I found out on Saturday, February 11, 2012 that Whitney Houston had died unexpectedly at the age of 48, the image that immediately came to mind was of the beautiful woman who starred as the preacher's wife in the movie by that name. I love that film and have seen it many times. I knew she was also a singer, and that she had experienced problems with drugs and a troubled marriage, for that was in the news. On television during the next few days I learned much more about her, including stories of her strong faith in God and in Jesus. All of this was enough to make me decide to watch her funeral service, or homegoing, to use the term chosen by her childhood Baptist Church in Newark, New Jersey, where the service was to take place. The church building holds about 1600 people, as I recall, and it was filled with invited guests. In addition, Whitney's mother allowed one camera to record the service, so it could be broadcast live worldwide. What a wise decision! I felt as if I were in the church in New Jersey rather than in my room in Sky View as the service began at noon on Saturday, February 18, a week after her death, and could easily imagine that others felt the same. God enlarged the building that day, so to speak, and all who wanted to attend, found a seat.

First on the program were two praise numbers sung by the choir where Whitney had her start as a singer at the age of 11. The pastor made it clear that this was a homegoing celebration, and that when his community is in deep pain, they have church – that is, they turn to God. A person in my room, hearing this, remarked: "I wonder what home she's going to. She was drinking and using drugs until she died." I would have answered her, except for one fact: I CAN'T TALK! Instead, I have been thinking about this subject for more than a week, wondering how I could WRITE an answer to some common misconceptions people have about salvation and eternal life. This is a very personal subject for me, since my own peace of mind, in the midst of a progressive neurological disease that requires me to live in a nursing home, comes from the fact that I KNOW I will go to Heaven when I die, no matter what happens before then.

The misconception about salvation is that it can be earned by good behavior. If that were true, then it might also be true that people could lose their salvation (which includes a home in Heaven) by behaving badly. But salvation CANNOT be earned. Rather, God-who-loves-us-all enters into a personal, permanent relationship with anyone who is willing to receive his love. The process includes the forgiveness of all the sins of those who respond, made possible by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Listening to speaker after speaker during the 3 hour and 45 minute service for Whitney Houston made it ABUNDANTLY clear that she was deeply in love with God and with Jesus. In fact, the last time she sang in public, an unplanned performance less than 2 days before she died, she chose to sing "Jesus Loves Me." Friends told of her well-worn Bible and of how she spoke so openly about her God.

Tyler Perry, one of the speakers, was particularly eloquent on the subject we are addressing. He said that when he and Whitney would meet after having been apart for some time, she would bring him up-to-date on her story. When she came to a part that was sad, she would always say, "But my Lord ..." or "But my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ..." She was constantly aware of God's

involvement in every aspect of her life. Then Tyler read so well a marvelous passage of Scripture from the apostle Paul in the 8th chapter of Romans, adding a bit of commentary, as you will see: *"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height (her celebrity) nor depth (her degradation), nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

That passage should put an end to the questions about Whitney's destination. Her body is in a cemetery in New Jersey, while she herself is happy and well in Heaven with her Lord. She is there by God's grace (undeserved, unearned favor) because of her faith (believing in him). Thank God we don't have to earn Heaven, or we would all fall short; certainly I would!

One more element was outstanding in the service, and that was LOVE. When Whitney's casket was rolled down the aisle at the end to a recording of her own voice singing "I Will Always Love You," I thought of 1 Corinthians 13:13 – *"And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."* Yes, love remains. Praise God!

Wednesday, February 29, 2012. I wanted to be sure to use this date, since it is so rare. :)

The 2 words that Amy gave us to break down on February 25 were very difficult, making the list of words with 5 or more letters short. Therefore, I am going to include them here for my enjoyment, and, hopefully, yours.

calcographer aa e o
 cc rr l g p h

graph chore gopher grape grope large porch perch grace place
clear leach pager parer coach charge racer glare parch alpha
peach cheap cargo preach reach charger pearl

When we were going around the table contributing our words to the master list, Lynn named a word that raised objections. "That word needs an 'i,'" several said. "Not the way I spelled it," she laughed, and we laughed with her.

ramiferous a e i o u
 rr m f s

arise arouse fires mouse miser fumes riser reams mares marries
smear rumor friar frame safer fears armor farmer farms sorer
sourer

On both lists there are far more long words than we got during our activity downstairs. As I said, I don't give myself a time limit!

Wednesday, March 7, 2012. Yesterday was my daughter Marty's birthday. As soon as I was in my chair, I sent her a greeting by email. Today I got a puzzling reply from her. She e-mailed: "Thanks for the WONDERFUL birthday gift!! I will cherish it and use it often!!"

Gift? I thought. What gift?

Then she quoted from my email the part she was referring to: "Take a deep breath; hold it and know that you are blessed and loved; exhale. Repeat as often as you wish."

Aware of my daughter's very busy schedule, and wishing for her a little "me time" on her birthday, I wrote the above; it was Marty's creative mind and generous spirit that saw it as a gift. With her approval, I am sharing this story with you, my readers, in case any of you want to use it for yourselves or for your friends. Thanks, Marty!

Friday, March 16, 2012. Judy Via, a 13-year resident of Sky View and my neighbor on the 4th floor, died yesterday morning from a combination of Multiple Sclerosis and breast cancer. If I were to write a story about her, I might title it "The Woman Who Couldn't Help Being Cheerful!" When I arrived at Sky View, Judy had already been here 7 years, yet in all the time I knew her, I never heard a critical or complaining word come out of her mouth, and Judy was very vocal. Two more facts made this seem remarkable: she was younger than most of the rest of us, being only 68 when she died, and she was happily married, with 2 grown sons, of whom she was very proud. "My family took care of me as long as they could, and then I came here," she would explain with a smile that held no regrets. When asked how she was, she'd say, "I'm fine!" And when asked if she'd like to attend an activity, she'd cheerily reply, "Why not?"

On her chair, Judy was often placed in the lobby across from the 4th floor elevators. People getting off or onto the elevators were not only greeted by Judy's bright "Hello!" but often by a compliment as well. Her sharp eyes would locate something, and she'd say, "I like your shirt (necklace, earrings, tie, sweater)" or "You're a good person!" I could just as truthfully title a story about her "The Woman Who Couldn't Help Paying Compliments!" Perhaps Judy was born with an effusive, optimistic, social nature; it isn't hard for me to imagine her as a person everybody loved all her life. But I know something else that was surely a factor: she was deeply devoted to God and to her Catholic religion. In addition to practicing her Catholicism, she also attended the services my team and I give on the 1st Thursday of the month. When a service ended, Judy would immediately say to the moderator, as though speaking for everyone, "Thank you for coming! You are a good minister!"

A week or so before she died, Judy was spending some time in our Day Room. As I passed by, I heard her say, "My aides say I have a good attitude." The person with her confirmed that this was true, which must have meant a lot to Judy. Obviously she wanted to finish her earthly race well, and she certainly did! The memory of her sweet, positive attitude remains strong here at Sky View and will challenge us for a long time to come. Well done, Judy!

Saturday, March 31, 2012. Well, the entire month of March has gone by with no snow, after only 2 inches in February and 6 in January. This was the 4th warmest winter on record. More than two weeks ago the flowering trees, spring bulbs, and bushes burst into bloom, all far ahead of schedule. Last week I saw our neighbor mowing his lawn – in March! To counteract the fact that we didn't have our regular winter, I decided to close this issue of my journal with a story from the past, which I resurrected to use in Sky View's Horizons. I'm glad I have room to share it with you. Enjoy! With this story I will conclude Penny 26. See you, Lord willing, in Penny 27!

MY FATHER'S RECIPE FOR SNOW ICE CREAM

This is a story I wrote in January, 1996 about an incident that took place in the winter of 1961. From our home in New York I phoned my parents in Annville, Pennsylvania (my hometown) to ask for a recipe from my dad. The story begins with a portion of the letter my mother wrote in response to my request. It is dated February 10, 1961.

"I asked Dad to write and tell you how he makes snow ice cream and he said he can't, because he just dumps it together and does not measure anything. He starts with beating one egg in a bowl, then adds a pinch of salt and vanilla and 1 glass or 1-1/2 glass of milk depending on how much you want to make, and sugar, try 1/3 cup – you may need more. So you see this takes tasting, at least

the first time you make it. Then stir in clean snow, until it is like you want it. We did not have any since the evening we talked with you. The snow here is too dirty now. I think Dad made some four times this winter. It got real good.”

Snow ice cream was a wintertime treat at our house as far back as I can remember (the late 1930s) and all through my growing up years (the 1940s), but I can’t recall ever making it with my own family even after I got the instructions. This was one of only two food items I remember my dad making. The other was our Sunday morning oatmeal. It was delicious! When I was older I asked Dad how he made that extra-good oatmeal. He smiled and said, “I just follow the recipe on the box!”

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Verna Kwiatkowski

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