

## A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 27

(APRIL – JUNE, 2012)

**Saturday, April 7, 2012.** Hello again, my readers. Two days ago I finished my previous journal. That same day we held our “Good Friday” service here at Sky View, emphasizing the death of Jesus on the cross. Lord willing, we will have our Easter service tomorrow. What a wonderful time to think about the core of our faith. Before I write any more, I want to tell you about something that happened on –

**Sunday, April 1, 2012.** Yes, it was April Fool’s Day! Years ago I decided I would no longer play tricks on people on this day or any other, as something just didn’t seem right about it. That doesn’t mean people stopped trying to fool me! On the evening of April 1, Ruth and I were sitting in the lobby discussing these things when our nurse John came by, dressed in white, as is his custom. Tania, one of our aides, said to him, “John! There’s a bug on your pants!” Immediately John tried to locate the insect, to no avail. How heartily he laughed when Tania said, “April Fool!” “You got me good!” he said.

Shortly thereafter, Tania came into my room to assist my aide in getting me ready for bed. “Verna, may I have this \$200?” she asked, pointing to a spot on my desk. “What could she possibly mean?” I wondered, knowing full well that there was no \$200 on the desk. Had someone put a few dollars there? Was she exaggerating the amount? Or was \$200 written on the cover of a magazine that was there? I was still completely baffled when Tania solved the puzzle by saying, “April Fool!” She got me good, too!

**Monday, April 9, 2012.** I noticed above that I said LORD WILLING we would have our Easter service on Sunday. Well, we ALMOST had to postpone it due to a stomach virus that is moving through Sky View. Sunday morning my nurse and I discussed the matter and decided that if the Catholic mass went on as usual and Easter dinner was served in the Main Dining Room, then we would have our service at 2:30 as planned. I’m so glad we didn’t postpone our program, even though many who otherwise would have attended were absent due to sickness. George, Leo, Earl, and Bill Harris (who has been helping with our holiday services) did a fine job of presenting the program George had assembled from the Scriptures, Easter hymns, and the various resurrection meditations I have written through the years. I was seated between my daughter Marty and my resident friend Ruth, watching George’s wife Janet distribute programs, all in honor of Jesus, who died and rose again. What a joy!

**Saturday, April 14, 2012.** All this week after the Easter service I remained in my room trying to avoid the stomach virus. The main dining room was closed from Sunday evening until noon yesterday, so everyone had to eat on their own floors. Activities (which also had been canceled) resumed yesterday. Even though the crisis has waned considerably – and I have not gotten sick – I plan to remain cautious this weekend. Part of my concern is that the time is rapidly approaching when I must have my feeding tube changed, and I want to be healthy for that event. You may recall that I went to the hospital for a tube change in January, only to have the doctor advise that he wanted to wait until the tube deteriorated further. Now it leaks at times. I have faxed him the news, and now await his reply.

**Saturday, April 21, 2012.** What a week this has been! It certainly was different! It all began Sunday morning while I was still in bed. That's right: I was one of the last resident victims of the stomach virus! I spent the next two days in bed, trying to recover quickly while keeping my germs from others. The Sky View staff gave me excellent care, which involved calling my doctor, and by Tuesday I was back in my chair.

Then it was Wednesday, my 79th birthday! The outpouring of love that I felt on and around this birthday was phenomenal! Early Wednesday four members of the Activities Department came, as they routinely do, to sing to me and tie two balloons to my chair. I got a large number of cards and emails, many with notes and sentiments so sweet they moved me to tears. All glory to God. In the afternoon several unexpected events happened in quick succession. First, I heard James enter the room with his walker, followed by Ruth. James handed me a birthday card he had made from folded pink paper on which he had written a wonderful greeting. Then he and Ruth sang heartily to me. Shortly thereafter a surprising quartet came in: my nurse and three aides from the newly arrived evening shift! They too presented me with a rousing rendition of Happy Birthday! My neighbor Alice wheeled herself in to see what was going on, and gladly joined in the festivities. The day was filled with hugs, kisses, and good wishes!

Kathy, our nurse supervisor, also arrived in the afternoon bearing a message: Dr. Martin would be able to change my tube the next day, if I were available; if not, it might be some time before he could schedule another appointment. "Maybe I should consider the new tube to be another birthday gift," I thought, as I gave my consent

Thursday was a BEAUTIFUL spring day! I thoroughly enjoyed nature's colorful springtime palate as the ambulance transported me in the late morning to Phelps Memorial Hospital, accompanied by Zonia, Sky View's primary transport aide. In the Endoscopy department I met with Dr. Martin, and was prepared for anesthesia. Usually I am sedated only 15 or 20 minutes, but this time something went wrong. Unlike other times, I woke up in a recovery room, apparently having some trouble with my breathing. I don't know exactly what happened, but I know it took several medications, several hours, and various oxygen treatments before I was ready to go home. There were no problems after that, and by 7:45 I was in my own bed, glad the ordeal of getting a new tube was over for now. My nurses and aides are as pleased as I am that the old tube is gone!

Add to all this the wonderful fact that the Volume 1, 2012 issue of Sky View's Horizons was distributed on Wednesday, and you can see that indeed this was quite a week for me!

**Saturday, April 28, 2012.** This week I had a special treat: I listened to an audio recording of the book *Alex & Me*, by Irene M. Pepperberg, and loaned to me by Andrea, my reflexologist. Alex was a parrot that became Ms. Pepperberg's friend while she was training and observing him scientifically. What an amazing bird Alex was! Besides having an extensive vocabulary, he gave clear evidence of being able to think in ways previously thought impossible for birds. It was a fascinating story!

What really connected me with Alex is that his speech pattern was similar to mine. He would say "Want nut," "Want banana" or "Want go back" (when he was tired of working). With my Lightwriter, I am constantly abbreviating my sentences, too. I might type "Want aide," "Need nurse" or "Must go tilt," referring to my chair, when my body needs a rest. Sometimes, in my

desire to conserve finger strokes, I make my messages so terse that they are misunderstood. After all these years, I still have much room for improvement. Tying my efforts to those of a parrot adds humor to the ongoing project. Thanks, Alex!

**Saturday, May 5, 2012.** As I look back over the past week, there are three events I want to record. First, I had my annual checkup by an ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat) doctor on Tuesday, May 1. This included the annual cleaning of my ears. What made this incident more than routine was that it took place in a new location, and with a new doctor, as my previous ENT had moved away. I am so glad I live in a place where details like this are handled for me! I tried not to be anxious, while allowing myself some of the tension and excitement that comes from being human. My new doctor turned out to be skilled at putting me at ease as well as at cleaning out my ears. I won't mind seeing her again!

The second event was our service on May 3. The theme was obedience, structured around a poem I wrote in 1997 titled What Do You Do? (The answer to that question is that you do whatever God tells you to do!) The interesting thing is that there was so much good material left over that I have a good head start for the June service, also on obedience!

And the third, which will demonstrate the problems I have with communications, took place early this morning, at 2 AM, to be exact. That's when Vivienne, my night aide, came into my room to take care of me. "How are you?" she asked. I nodded my head, which most people correctly assume to mean, "I am fine." Then, wanting to keep the conversation going, I gestured toward her. To me, it was clear that I was saying, "And how are you?" But she answered, "You like my shirt?" Lovely as it was, I shook my head, for that is NOT what I meant. "You like my necklace?" she guessed, and again I shook my head. Determined to find out what I meant, Vivienne leaned over my bed and said, "Point to what you mean." I wondered how I could indicate that I was asking about HER, not referring to what she was wearing. Finally I reached up and touched her face. "My chin? You like my double chin?" she asked incredulously.

By then we were both laughing. Keep in mind that my PLS laughter is LOUD and basically uncontrollable. (The same is true of my crying.) At that point I was willing to drop the whole issue, but Vivienne would have none of that! Unplugging my Lightwriter, she laid it across my abdomen, turned on the light, raised the head of my bed, and said, "Type what you mean." Thinking back to the original question I was trying to ask, I pressed the Memory button and then the letter H. Immediately this message filled my Lightwriter screen: HELLO. HOW ARE YOU? As soon as she caught on, GALES of laughter poured out of Vivienne and mixed with my barking chuckles. The nursing supervisor came in to see what was going on, followed by my nurse. Reassured, they smiled and left.

The greatest thing about this story is the effect that it had on Vivienne. She told me she had been SO-O-O tired when she entered my room. After such a hearty dose of laughter, she had not only revived, but was ENERGIZED to finish her work. The Lord knows how to supply the needs of his children! What a privilege for me to be in a place where my condition could be used by God to benefit another! All glory to God!

**Friday, May 18, 2012.** All week I have been thinking about Innocent, an aide from Rwanda who worked at Sky View for the past four or five years. Although I was never on his regular schedule,

I was assigned to him often enough that we became good friends. All this was facilitated by the fact that we are both members of God's faith family! From the start I began giving him copies of my poems. Innocent was the person who first called my poems psalms, causing me to set them up like Psalms in the Bible, with pertinent information between the title and the start of the poem.

Innocent came to the United States for his safety, leaving behind his wife and two young daughters, knowing it might be 10 years before he could return. He talked with me about this, wondering about the best time to go home. Two months ago, when I realized his departure time was drawing near, I prepared a gift of my writings for him to take with him to Africa; my mind was so relieved when he had that gift in his hands! Today, almost eleven years later, my friend is back in Rwanda, having arrived within the past 24 hours. I am SO happy for all of them!

The final time I had Innocent as my aide was last Friday. We were so happy to see each other! He told me his revised plans, which would take him home earlier than originally scheduled, and I responded with smiles and a deep inner happiness. Then halfway through my routine, Innocent mentioned that this was probably the last time he would have me on his schedule. That's all it took to start my tears flowing, leading to the sounds I just described. "No, don't cry, Verna," Innocent pleaded. "You are the one who ENCOURAGED me to go home!" I nodded, and tried hard to curtail the noise. I may never see him again on earth, but I will certainly see him in Heaven. What a comfort!

**Monday, June 4, 2012.** The service for June 7 is finished at last, giving me some time to catch up on other things. In 2009 and 2010 I wrote birthday poems for Nadine, one of our 4th floor aides. In the latter poem, when she turned 44, I asked her to wait until she was turning 46 before requesting another, and she complied. Therefore, when she reminded me a couple weeks ago that her birthday was coming, I sat down at my computer and began to write. Here's what I came up with:

#### TO NADINE – 2012

You waited 2 years, as I had requested,  
But before your last poem was fully digested,  
Quickly as a wink you have turned 46!  
And here I am – in the midst of a fix,  
For what can I say that I have not already said?  
Or doesn't it matter what is spinning in my head?  
It's a mixture of things, some new, some old,  
Boiling down to this, that I have never told:  
Your voice and your laughter, ringing in the hall,  
Give this sweet assurance to me and to all:  
Calm down. Be at peace. Do not fear.  
All will be well, for Nadine is here!

THANK YOU, NADINE! AND HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

I printed it on pretty paper and presented it to her at the right time. Nadine was truly touched, and said it would join the other poems on her refrigerator door.

**Tuesday, June 5, 2012.** These past 10 days have been intense ones for our family, and the adventure is not over yet! It started over the Memorial Day weekend with an unexpected visit from our daughter MaryBeth, from Hamilton, Massachusetts. She had thought she couldn't come, since their teenage sons had commitments they had to fulfill over the holiday. Then her husband suggested she go alone to visit her family, while he would take care of things at home. And so it happened that Leo and I each had hours of "alone time" with our daughter, which we all enjoyed.

Then on Tuesday, May 29, down in North Carolina, our son David, his wife Dana, and their daughter Amy, age 20, boarded a plane and headed to India for a mission trip scheduled to end with their arrival home on June 9. First they helped with a medical clinic and then they were to attend a pastor's conference, where Dave was scheduled to speak. Dave is also keeping a journal, which, I'm sure, will be fascinating, especially since he is such a good writer!

Meanwhile, on Friday, June 1 in California, our granddaughter Andi gave birth to a son, ushering Leo and me into the category of great-grandparents! The little fellow's name is Emmett Hunter. And so our youngest son Paul is a grandfather now! Grace, mercy, and peace be theirs in abundance as they start out on a new adventure with God.

**Thursday, June 7, 2012.** Today is the 1st Thursday of June, so you know we had our service this afternoon. This is the only time that I can remember, at least here at Sky View, where I prepared WAY too much material. Usually I have a very good sense of what will fill the 40-45 minutes I allot for myself. Fortunately, Cliff, Leo, and George all mentioned their suspicions about the length. We worked together to trim the program, both the written material and the music, cutting some hymn verses today, before and during the service. With all the editing, it was still 5 minutes longer than I would have liked. I don't know what happened to my thinking process this time, but I'll be watching for similar incidents in the future. My brain is the central location for PLS!

Concluding our family saga (for now), George's son Evan, who lives and works in Denver, Colorado, came to see me recently, along with his father, catching me up on his doings and his future plans. Evan is leaving next week, Lord willing, to join a mission team that will be working in several countries in southeastern Africa until July 3. Most of their scheduled projects involve working with children in various situations. Evan is a veteran of mission trips, having previously served the Lord in Mexico, Peru, and Haiti, a place that he has visited repeatedly. The trip to Africa will be the longest one he has taken. I look forward to his report!

**Wednesday, June 13, 2012.** Our family saga continues! On Monday, out in California, Andi (age 19) and her baby's father, along with their parents, turned our great-grandson over to an adoption agency, which then gave him to a previously chosen couple to raise as their own. The transfer was supposed to have happened in the hospital, but at the last minute Andi changed her mind. Paul says the week the baby was at his house was important in many ways, and I can understand that. During the week Emmett's name was changed to Davey Alexander, but on Monday he was given his permanent name: Gavin Thomas. May God bless him and his new parents.

Because Paul kept us informed, we went through this intense incident together as a family, more specifically, as a family that desires to honor God. The Scriptures have notable stories of adoption that turned out well, like Moses, Samuel, and even Jesus! Paul said in an email that ultimately all of God's children are adopted, and, of course, that's true. That is a huge subject that will give us food for thought from a new perspective for a long time to come. I still consider myself to be a great-grandma. I say that because nothing can change the fact that out in California, on June 1, my beloved granddaughter Andi gave birth to a baby!

**Friday, June 15, 2012.** OUR 55TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY! An unexpected two days free of sports appointments for our grandson John allowed MaryBeth to come to New York with her two sons to help celebrate the occasion. And so it happened that five of us, including Leo, got to spend several hours together here in my room this afternoon. It was wonderful! For our main entertainment I asked that we look through the album from our 50th anniversary party, held in the Methodist Church at Shrub Oak. That book is full of pictures, cards, letters, and notes, all brimming with love. Leo and MaryBeth took turns reading aloud the letters and notes; they were as fresh and wonderful as they were when first we read them!

**Friday, June 29, 2012.** I took time off from Penny to write our next service, all the while thinking that the story about our anniversary was not yet finished. Today I asked Cliff to get the 50th wedding anniversary album and find the note that described marriage as a dance. He found it and read it aloud. That confirmed what I had been thinking ever since Leo read it on the 15th and commented about how good it was: it belonged in my journal. Here, now, is the rest of the anniversary story.

My longtime friend Diane Ackerman was one of many who enclosed beautiful sentiments in her card in 2007. Diane has lived for decades with Rheumatoid Arthritis. How I have admired the way she has handled her life with almost constant pain! She wrote in a recent email, "You don't blame God for your PLS and I don't blame God for my RA." And that's our common bond: in our afflictions we turn TO God, not FROM him, knowing that he has a purpose for everything, and that our diseases are only temporary, that is, they will NOT follow us into Heaven! Here is what Diane wrote:

Marriage is like a dance. It can go from a dreamy waltz to acrobatic action, from a sensuous tango to the bunny hop. As choreographers, we adapt to the stage. Each partner is perceptive to the other's plans. Each feels the beat and the direction, then takes the lead or follows when needed to help the other through a misstep.

Even if the dance has not been done before, a change in the music makes the partner shift and adapt to a different beat. Both stay in tune with each other, sometimes in harmony and often out of the spotlight, even at times standing still. Today you are both in the spotlight. In spite of limitations, Verna and Leo are dancing more gracefully than ever before. When they dance together their performance is synergistic and an inspiration to us all.

Many people, like Diane, tell me that I inspire them by the way I handle having PLS and living in a nursing home, and I thank God for that. But with her creative imagery, Diane spoke of Leo and

me as a couple, and I'm glad she did! Leo was certainly affected when I came down with PLS in 2003. Gone in a flash were all his dreams of traveling with me. Then our house was sold and we were living in Drum Hill! Two years later I was in Sky View, and Leo was coming to visit me almost daily. Now, five years after she wrote the above, I can see that Diane was right: Leo and I are "dancing more gracefully than ever before." We encourage each other in our respective ministries, admire the way we both have adapted to changes, and see God clearly at work in each other's lives. Although living apart, we remain a couple, one whose love is not only intact, but growing! Only God could have made that happen. He took all our "mis-steps" – both individual and as a couple – and turned them into something good (see Romans 8:28). And so both Leo and I are enjoying our relationship today, knowing that the best is yet to come! Praise God!

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I will conclude this issue with a rainbow story that took place last week in my room. One afternoon I looked out of my window and saw an absolutely stunning rainbow! Its expanse went from the Hudson River on my right into the hills on my left, with a high arch in-between. I had seen similar rainbows in the same place before. What made this one so stunning was that, for the first time that I can remember, I saw clearly all seven colors of the bow. Yes, SEVEN! "VIB-GY'-OR: Violet, Indigo, Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange, and Red," my 7th grade art teacher said. "Remember Vibgyor and you will never forget the colors in a rainbow, nor their order." The problem for me was that I had never seen a band of color between violet and blue; I had never seen indigo – until last week!

I am the kind of person who likes to share extraordinary experiences with others, so I drove my chair out into the lobby and day room areas, looking for Ruth. I knew she would be able to get to my room and would appreciate the rainbow, seeing it as God's handiwork. But Ruth was not in sight. Quickly, then, I returned to my room to enjoy the rainbow alone. While admiring its beauty, I reminded myself of God's promise to Noah the first time a rainbow appeared (imagine seeing THAT one!) and thought of the throne in Revelation that is described, among other things, as being encircled by a rainbow, which I certainly WILL see! Finally the bow began to fade, and I went back to work.

Two days later my aide Andrea came into my room and asked me if I had seen the rainbow a couple days ago. At my nod both our faces lit up with delight! God knew our desires, and doubled our pleasure by letting us relive the experience TOGETHER in our memories! Isn't God good?! How he loves his children – including you!