

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 29

(OCTOBER – DECEMBER, 2012)

Friday, October 5, 2012. Greetings to my readers! It's interesting to be embarking on a 3 month project, not knowing what may happen tomorrow! My life and my writings are in God's hands, and so, with a smile in my heart, I am ready to begin Penny 29. I have some follow-up information on stories from previous journal issues that I will record at the start.

In Penny 25, on November 10, 2011, I wrote a story about a ballet I saw from the window in my room performed by what I described as "large, black birds, larger than the crows that sometimes sit on the ledge outside my window." Recently a visitor in my room glanced at the sky and said, "Oh, look at the hawk!" I knew in a moment that the birds that danced so exquisitely for me last fall were hawks, about a dozen of them! Just now a hawk flew by, as if to confirm my story. Isn't that good of God? Thank you, Lord, for remembering my questions, and for giving me the answers in due time.

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In the second volume of Sky View's Horizons for 2012, which was distributed last month, we included from Penny 27 the April Fool's Day stories that happened at Sky View this year, PLUS some interesting additional material sent to me by my brother Bob, who lives in Maryland. I don't remember why I didn't include this in Penny 27, but here it is now. The italicized section is all from Horizons.

I call my journal "A Penny For Your Thoughts" ("Penny," for short). Each issue covers 3 months; Penny 27 covered April – June, 2012. Early in July this issue was put on my website, and my family and friends were notified. The next day I received this email from my younger brother Bob:

"I just read Penny 27. Your stories about April Fool's Day reminded me of one time when we were still living at 233 S. Lancaster Street in Annville, Pennsylvania. April 1 was on a Sunday. You apparently had dried a pair of nylons over the bathtub, the pair that you planned to wear to church that morning. I remember [our brother] Harold 'getting you' when he told you that he had accidentally knocked them into the bathtub and they were again all wet. The things we remember!"

How I have enjoyed that glimpse into the past! It must have been in 1951, when I was almost 18, Harold was 15, and Bob almost 5. That long-lost memory is now as fresh and warm in my mind as though it happened just a few years ago. Thanks, Bob!

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There are 2 more follow-ups I want to write, both from entries in Penny 28. The first has to do with Helen, my newly-discovered caseworker from the ALS Society, but even more with God, who always knows where all of us are, and is an EXPERT at bringing people together! Until this past July the only link I thought I had with the ALS Society was that this generous organization was the one that loaned me the Lightwriter, a compact blue computer that sits on my lap, allowing me to communicate. When I met Helen, it seemed as if my world suddenly enlarged significantly, much as it did when my website became

operative, or when I got my MailBug, so I could send and receive emails. Besides access to the Society's store of equipment, my caseworker brings at least 2 more valuable resources to me: information and contacts. I made a second appointment in which Helen, who is also a nurse, answered all my questions about PLS. But the greatest thing she did was to bring me into contact with another person in our area who has PLS! I know God was behind our introduction, for my new friend is a Catholic nun, who also is trying to honor the Lord through this illness. What an encouragement we can be to each other as our email correspondence develops! Praise the Lord.

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The second has to do with the story I told in August about Jane, who told me she was looking forward to meeting me in Heaven. I said I appreciate people who speak of Heaven naturally, believing that there is such a place to which they are headed. For example, when Charlotte, one of a number of residents at Sky View who is more than 100 years old, was moved to a different room on the 4th floor, she happily announced, "This is my last move until I go to Heaven!" Sharing her joy, I smiled in response.

Then in September I sent email birthday greetings to my college friend Ginny Elms, who lives in Ohio. Knowing that she and her husband had relocated into a retirement complex a few months ago, I asked how she liked living in her new surroundings. The next day I had an answer, which said, in part: "We are enjoying living here very much. The livin' is easy! We feel that God's hand was in the decision from start to finish, and He gave so much grace in the process. I do not miss my former 'home' one little bit!" Certainly I was happy for them, but the part that really stirred my heart was the way she put the word *home* in quotation marks! What a great way to indicate that Heaven is our true, permanent home, while the places we occupy on earth are only temporary! Immediately my mind went to these verses from Hebrews that I love so much:

Hebrews 11:9,10 – By faith (Abraham) made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Some of you may not know what a huge role Ginny and Heaven played in my spiritual life, so I will briefly explain. She and I met in September, 1951 when we were freshmen in college. Soon after we arrived, Ginny came into my dormitory room to visit, and, in the course of our conversation, said she knew she was going to Heaven. I was shocked! "I thought you had to die to find out if you made it!" I exclaimed, reflecting my church's teaching. She calmly explained that she would be in Heaven because she believed in Jesus, not because she earned it with good behavior. In June, 1953 God gave me the same assurance, and it has never left me. I'll see you in Heaven, Ginny!

Saturday, October 6, 2012. This afternoon I went downstairs into the dining room and spent some time looking at the sailboats on the Hudson on this beautiful autumn day. Sitting alone at a table nearby was John, a man I had been wanting to meet, thinking we may be able to communicate. So I drove over to him and introduced myself. Quickly John caught on to the technique of reading the screen on my Lightwriter, adjusting his glasses so he could see more clearly. We talked easily for perhaps 10 minutes, and then it was time for me to leave. Wanting to let him know that I would like to continue our

conversation another time, I typed, "I would like to talk again." "I guess you would!" John laughed. "And I would like to hear again without hearing aids, and both of us wear glasses for imperfect sight!" I was completely baffled. I couldn't imagine what he found so funny – until I took a second look at what I had written! Doesn't it sound like I wished for my speech to return? Joining in his laughter, I cleared the Lightwriter screen and began typing again: "I mean I would like to talk with you again." John understood then why I had been so puzzled. Both of us smiled as I drove away, knowing our conversation was To Be Continued.

My son George, who is my chief editor, has often told me that MORE words, if they will clarify a passage, are to be preferred over terseness; the above story is a good case in point! If you are wondering whether I do wish to talk again on earth, let me say this: From the time of my diagnosis in 2003 I have accepted my progressive limitations as if they came from my loving Lord, who works from a plan FAR bigger than I can fathom, and who would NEVER cause me harm. I am helped enormously by thoughts of Heaven, my eternal Home, where all my temporary impediments will be gone! Until then, by the grace of God, I wait. (The short answer to the supposed question is: No.)

Saturday, October 13, 2012. I am happy to report that my old computer has now been upgraded so that I can use it with my new printer! My daughter Marty was in charge of this complicated, 3 month project. I certainly appreciate her perseverance!

Part of my purpose for keeping a journal is to record the progression of my disease. For the past couple weeks I have noticed a big change in my ability to use my arms, hands, and fingers. The control center in my brain that governs these parts is closing down, that's for sure! Also, I keep leaning to the right, reminding me of Dad, who had Parkinson's disease. Sometimes my right arm slips off the arm of my chair, and I FLOP to the side. So far I have been able to get myself partially upright again.

Sunday, October 28, 2012. The scene from my window has been especially beautiful this week, with orange, maroon, and yellow mingling with the evergreens. This week I adapted a service from 2007 to use for November 1st. George told me years ago that assembling a program from already-written material can be just as creative as writing new material, and he's right! In December I plan to use my new poem, Included, completed this month. In Penny 28 I said this poem was finished in July, but then I found it needed much revising. Here is the poem as it now stands:

INCLUDED

By Verna Kwiatkowski. Sky View. © October, 2012.

I will be grateful
For all eternity
That in God's circle of love,
He included me.

And I'll be grateful –
This also is true –
That in God's circle of love,
He included you!

* * * * *

God our Father doesn't want ANYONE to be
Outside of his love circle for all eternity.

My heart aligns with God's; with my Father I agree.
How I wish that EVERYONE were in his eternal family!

I do not dare to guess who will be lost for eternity.
I leave the wicked to God; their hearts I cannot see.

The Lord knows who are his, belonging to his family tree.
He includes all those who turn to him, sealing them eternally.

Does God know you? Have you come to Christ? Do you see?
Are you sure of a home in Heaven? If not, would you like to be?

Put your faith in the Lord, who gave his life to set us free,
And you will be spiritually born into his wonderful family!

What an awesome change! It fills your heart with glee!
Then, newborn or old, you can say along with me:

I will be grateful
For all eternity
That in God's circle of love,
He included me.

Here is the story behind the poem. It began in April of this year as the little 4-line rhyme with which it opens. Small as it is, this poem tackles a large subject: life after death. Implied in the wording is the truth that there is more than one destination for people after they die, for if everyone went to Heaven, what would be the incentive for being grateful for all eternity that you were there? I don't think or speak very much about Hell, but I am aware of its existence. Made for the devil and his angels, this place is also the abode of those whom the Lord "did not know," due to their lack of faith. Most of what I know about Hell comes from a story Jesus told in Luke 16 about a man who went there when he

died. There are enough details in this story that I cannot IMAGINE wishing that ANYONE would spend eternity there! Musings of this sort led to verse 2 of the small poem, also written in April. I figured that, in the purified state we will have in Heaven, we would be happy to greet anybody we see there, humbly marveling at the mercy, grace, and love of God that saved us both.

When I wrote verse 2, I considered the poem, short as it was, to be complete. And in fact, it really CAN stand alone. But the more I read it, the more I saw it as an opportunity to bring up some facts about salvation, such as: Who gets to go to Heaven, and how? And so, over the next few months I began to write and edit my thoughts on this grand subject. This month (October) I had George read it to me, and as he read, a startling realization came over me, moving me to tears. "I think it's finished!" I exclaimed, and George agreed. Of course, in one sense it's never finished, for it keeps coming back to the beginning, a feature I enjoy. May you be blessed by this poem, and to God be the glory.

Saturday, December 1, 2012. How did this happen? The whole month of November went by without a single entry in my journal! I don't think that has ever happened before, although I certainly have struggled to catch up several times. November was an eventful month, to be sure! I kept no notes, so what I do record now comes only from my memory. My plan is to write about the month of November under one general title, while simultaneously keeping a current record of December. Are you ready to take this bumpy ride with me? Then let's go! (Yes, the last 2 sentences are based on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, a TV quiz show I enjoy watching.)

NOVEMBER, 2012

The month came in with the area lying under the devastation caused by hurricane Sandy, which took place a few days earlier. This is the second year in a row that the celebration of Halloween was officially postponed in our area due to unusual, severe weather! In 2011 we had a deep snowstorm near the end of October, and this year we had the most destructive storm system that EVER hit New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut in the "person" of hurricane Sandy. The next week, while much of the region was still in darkness, reeling from massive destruction from various sources, a nor'easter swept by, bringing ice and snow along with wind and rain. Both of these storms were predicted well ahead of time, so people had a chance to evacuate if they wanted to. I have never been in such a situation, so I can't say what I would have done if ordered to leave my house.

However, I can tell you what I DID do: I watched a lot of television and I wondered a lot about God's involvement on the earth, both in Bible times and now. Two more events added to the richness of my thinking at that time: We had a presidential election on November 6, and I was immersed in reading the Old Testament, by way of CD's, from Joshua and Judges through Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. I had never realized how much the Bible was involved with politics until it tangled with what I was hearing on TV! The weather even came up when I read about God's defeating Israel's enemies by hurling hailstones at them! There are many weapons of mass destruction that God built into the universe, like water, fire, lightning, wind, heat, cold, earthquakes, sink holes,

tides, volcanoes, and more. I'm not saying that God causes every storm or controls every election, but it does give me food for thought!

Do you remember that in Penny 28 I printed a 4-line poem, saying I thought it might develop into something more? Well, it did! Since I finished it in November, I am printing it here:

PLEASURE

*By Verna Kwiatkowski. Sky View, the nursing home
where I live happily, thankful for my wheelchair. A response
to one who unhappily said, "Sky View can't give me pleasure."*

Carry pleasure within yourself
And you will be happy anywhere:
In a house; assisted living; or in a
Nursing home in a wheelchair.

Carry pleasure within yourself
And you will never be bored!
Delightful pastimes fill your mind
From the place where they are stored.

Carry pleasure within yourself
And your heart will be content;
No matter what goes on outside,
You consider your time well spent.

Lord, may pleasure be firmly rooted
On the inside of all my friends,
Until we reach our heavenly Home,
Where pleasure never ends!

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I had another episode of upper respiratory infection in November, controlled by a week of antibiotics. Also I began working on the final 2012 volume of Sky View's Horizons. I've cut back on my involvement in this project, doing mainly editing and layout work. The new issue should be out by the end of December.

On November 18, the Sunday before Thanksgiving, my team gave a Thanksgiving service here at Sky View, under George's direction. I LOVED it! That was all the celebrating I needed to do for the holiday. And then it was time to plan the December service!

In case you're wondering: Sky View did not suffer loss during the hurricane. We didn't even lose electricity, although millions all around us did. That night the wind blew so strongly that I thought our trembling windows might blow in! I find it interesting that last night, as I contemplated the conclusion to this report, we had ANOTHER severe wind

and rain storm that rattled the windows! That's the way winter came in, for today is December 21st, and I have arrived at the

END OF MY NOVEMBER REPORT.

Thursday, December 6, 2012. What a day this has been! Yes, it's the first Thursday of the month, so our service was held this afternoon. The friendship that has developed the team members is beautiful to see – and to experience! The service was very creative, looking back at the celebration of Thanksgiving and forward to the celebration of Christmas. I used the poem Included as a major point for meditation, plus A Shower Of Thanksgiving, and A Card From a Thankful Person. The latter was sent to me early in November by my cousin Louise Rabold, who lives in North Carolina. Inside the card Louise wrote an absolutely beautiful prayer of thanksgiving to our Lord, which I turned into a reading for 2 people, specifically Leo and George, because they know her. Our program had another delightful burst of creativity at the end. As I frequently do, I had asked Cliff to prepare a blessing to use for a closing. This time he wrote a Scripture duet combining parts of Isaiah 9 with John 3:16. I loved it! Now add to all this artistry the fact that I'm writing a new poem that can be sung to an old hymn tune, and you may be able to understand what happened next.

Shortly before 6 P.M. Andrea, my reflexologist, arrived for our weekly session together. While I was comfortably tilted in my chair, listening to soft music, watching as Andrea happily massaged my feet, my mind basking in the enjoyment of all I mentioned in the preceding paragraph, suddenly ANOTHER creative idea popped into my head, one so beautiful it made me cry. Of course Andrea wondered what was wrong. I pointed to my head. "A memory?" she guessed, and I nodded, not knowing how to explain. I feel so close to my creator God when working on creative pieces! That, too, can move me to tears!

What am I to do with all these ideas? Drop my necessary writing (Penny 29, emails) and work on the other things? Just last week George gave me an interesting thought that I am going to try. It had to do with taking our thoughts captive. Usually I have interpreted that to mean "Be careful what you think about." George's conversation added a new element: "Be careful when you think about things." Applied to me, it would look like this: If I am working on a project and another idea threatens to take over, slowing or stopping the original work, take the new idea captive – set it aside in some way – and finish the work at hand. When the right time comes, set the captive idea free to be fully developed and enjoyed. With this in mind, I may be able to complete December's writing! We'll see!

Friday, December 28, 2012. Today marks the 7th anniversary of my moving to Sky View! Leo, who was coordinating my care, thought I had only a short time to live when I came here. I didn't know that until recently! Obviously, God had other plans for me.

I did keep in mind the thought of capturing new ideas that intrude on the writing I am currently doing, EXCEPT that I found the regular writing was what I captured until the creative "intrusion" was handled. Now I will attempt to recreate for you – and for me! – my amazingly creative December.

It all began in late September or early October when I started to look ahead to the fast-approaching holidays. "It would be nice to write a new poem for Christmas," I thought. Then the idea of a holiday greeting came to mind. Would I write something to send my family and friends at Christmas, I wondered, or skip this year? There was also the matter of the 2 special services that George prepares from my material for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Though he never pressures me, George always gives me the opportunity to write something new for them if I wish. Usually I have done so.

As November sped by, it looked like none of the above would happen. Two things kept percolating in my mind, however: the remarkable Thanksgiving prayer my cousin Louise had composed and sent to me in early November, and two lines of a poem that popped into my mind on November 28. I knew those lines had the possibility of becoming another poem that could be sung to an old hymn tune, and that always makes me happy. The poem, which had nothing to do with Christmas, was coming along nicely when the incident I wrote about on December 6 took place. The thought that made me cry was this: Why not write a prayer of thanksgiving for the Incarnation, on the order of Louise's overflow of thanks? Yes, indeed! I could hardly wait to get started!

Marty came to visit on Sunday, December 9th, just as I put the finishing touches on my new hymn "Follow Me!" She read it, liked it, and said, "This could be your Christmas letter," opening up a possibility I hadn't thought about. All week I had been working on the prayer as well. I finished it on Tuesday, December 11th, and showed it to George when he came to visit that night. He did some minor editing, and left with a new piece for the Christmas Eve service! Then an amazing thing happened on Saturday, the 15th. Instead of the aide I was expecting, a per diem aide showed up, one whom I did not recognize. Almost immediately we connected in the Spirit, and I gave her copies of some poems and the prayer. As she began to read the latter, she paused as though pondering an idea. Then she asked if I could write a poem on the order of the prayer. Since I had previously contemplated writing a poem for Christmas, I had to consider if this were an assignment from God or merely a suggestion from my aide, who, like so many dear people in my life right now, is named Andrea. When various lines and rhymes began coming to my mind a short time later, I knew God had spoken to me through one of his servants, and that a poem was sure to follow.

What a great time I had on Saturday watching the poem take shape on my computer screen as I pecked away on my keyboard! Before her shift ended I told Andrea that I was writing the poem. She was pleased, and said she'd pick it up Tuesday the 18th, the next time she was scheduled to work at Sky View. On Sunday, just as Marty was entering my room, the poem was finished! Marty read it, made an editorial suggestion (which I accepted), and pronounced it fine for a Christmas greeting, along with the prayer, which she had read, AND the hymn. "All 3?" I asked. "I think they make a good set," she answered. And it was so! All 3 pieces are on my website, under Christmas greeting, if you want to read them.

When George saw LOOK IN THE MANGER, as the poem is titled, he said it must be included in the Christmas Eve service, too, along with the prayer. And THAT was so, too! What a wonderful service George assembled for the 24th, made even more special by a large audience, including his wife Janet, and sons Eric, Evan, and Andrew. The musical duet of Earl Brown (piano) and George (cello) became a trio on 3 of the carols when Evan joined them with his trumpet!

Sunday, December 30, 2012. Andrea did not come on Tuesday the 18th. All this past week I worked on the January service, based on the new hymn FOLLOW ME! I completed the task on Friday, shortly before Cliff (the moderator of our meetings) came for his weekly visit. First he read aloud through the service so we could look for things that needed to be changed, and then he copied and assembled the papers into packets for each member of the January team. Cliff and I will now get the packets to the individuals, who study them, preparing to participate next Thursday.

Yesterday a program change was announced: instead of Scattergories, a resident's son-in-law was going to perform a comedy show in the Main Living Room on the 1st floor. I attend very few activities per month, but decided to go this one, since the service was finished. I went down early and had not yet found a place to park when an aide-in-a-hurry came to a halt before me and said, "I was supposed to pick up a poem from you!" It was Andrea! "Let's get it now," I said, and as quickly as possible we were in my room. Soon she had the poem in her hand, expressed her gratitude, said she'd read it later, and left! I returned to the show and enjoyed it, but mostly I was basking in the recollection of a God-arranged appointment between 2 of his daughters! Hallelujah! Our God is an awesome God! Amen.

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Verna Kwiatkowski

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