

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 30

(JANUARY – MARCH, 2013)

Saturday, January 12, 2013. Hello, Everyone! Welcome to the start of a new journal issue AND a new year! May we face this year with confidence: God is WITH us and FOR us; we have no reason to fear!

2012 ended happily with a quick visit from the Dyers. They came from Massachusetts on Saturday, December 29, on road surfaces less than ideal, and returned on safer roads on Monday afternoon. In between, we enjoyed each other's company very much!

Monday, January 14, 2013. My accomplishments for the first half of January consist mainly of two things: dealing with a bronchial-type sickness that was spreading on the 2nd and 4th floors at Sky View, and writing my longest narrative poem: A VISIT FROM THE MAGI. On January 1st, when I had someone turn over my 2-year bamboo-style calendar from the Dollar Store, I noticed that the distance between the January and February services would be five weeks instead of the usual four. FOUND TIME! In this case, that meant I had time to relax and work on the poem that had been forming inside my head. I will print the poem here, and then comment on it.

A VISIT FROM THE MAGI

By Verna Kwiatkowski. Sky View. A companion piece to LOOK IN THE MANGER.

God couldn't be silent when virgin Mary gave birth;
He wanted the news to travel throughout the earth,
For the child was also his: God's one and only Son,
Who had humbled himself, his earthly work begun.

So God told his messengers, the angel cavalcade,
The very ones who sang when the earth was made.
They remembered creation, how they'd shouted for joy,
And now once again at the news of God's baby boy!

A multitude of angels found shepherds near Bethlehem
Who reacted in faith to everything the angels said to them,
While far away in the east God placed a special star - OR -
Was that star an angel? They'd been called stars before!

A group of Magi saw that star and they became entranced.
They had been expecting a sign. Their spirits fairly danced!
"The king has been born!" they said, recalling the prophecy.
"Look, the star is moving! Come on, let's go and see!"

The Magi traveled on, but as they neared the Israelites' land,
The star vanished! This was not what they had planned!
Jerusalem, it seemed to them, would be the place to go.
Wouldn't a king be born there? And wouldn't Herod know?

But Herod didn't know about a newborn king of the Jews,
And he certainly didn't like the implications of this news!
"We have come to worship him," the wise men boldly said.
Inside himself, Herod raged; that child was as good as dead!

The priests said Bethlehem was to be the baby's birthplace
And the Magi told the time of birth, anxious to see his face.
"Go and make a careful search," Herod smiled. "Good for you!
Then tell me where he is, so I can go and worship him, too!"

The trip to find the child was not as hard as they had feared,
For when they stepped outside, their guiding star appeared!
It stopped over the house where the family was now staying,
And soon they were all inside, the Magi bowed down, praying.

Then they opened their treasures for him, gifts of royal worth:
Gold, and incense, and myrrh for Jesus, King of all the earth!
What a story they had to tell – no, they were not deluded –
Jesus was born for everyone! Even they had been included!

At night the wise men and Joseph all had warning dreams.
Angels clearly told them about Herod's murderous schemes.
So the Magi returned to their country by a very different path,
And Joseph took his family to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath.

Those who didn't escape were the boys age two and under
In and around Bethlehem. They were all killed! No wonder
Weeping and great mourning filled the land with sorrow!
Parents, weeping for their children, couldn't face tomorrow.

The child Jesus, after Herod's demise, grew up in Nazareth.
Then, about the age of thirty-three, he too was put to death!
God's Son, willingly humbled as he hung on the cruel tree,
Completed the work he'd come to do: he died to set us free!

Don't consider his death to mean his mission was diminished;
The most triumphant cry in all the world is this: "It is finished!"
Death didn't have the final word; Jesus rose and then, ascending,
Became our advocate and friend, whose love is never-ending!

In the manger, in a house, on the cross, by our side, in the air,
People still encounter Jesus. He speaks to us from anywhere!
Let's worship him on bended knee, and give a gift we can afford:
With our tongues may we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Comments: It all began in December when I was writing the poem LOOK IN THE MANGER (see my [website](#)). When I got to the point where the angels were appearing to the shepherds, all of a sudden I had two new insights concerning the Magi:

1. Perhaps the night of the birth was the same time the star appeared to the Magi, making both the shepherds and the Magi simultaneous recipients of God's unique birth announcements, and

2. Maybe the "star" was an angel!

I was so tempted to include the story in my Christmas poem, but knew it didn't belong there since the wise men were NOT in the stable. Remember how the shepherds spread the news of what they had seen and heard? I picture some kindhearted family going to the stable and saying, "You are welcome to move in with us until you are ready to go back home." And that's where the Magi found Jesus, Mary, and Joseph at the conclusion of their trip. So I set aside these wonderful thoughts for later, and continued to write with my focus on the manger.

On **Saturday, January 5** I began to write A VISIT FROM THE MAGI, which I called "A companion piece to LOOK IN THE MANGER." Since the two poems share a common beginning (the birth of Jesus), I looked at the first poem to see if there were any parts in it that I could use to launch the second one. The result of that exercise was so unexpected: I decided to use verses 2 and 3 of the first poem (verbatim!) as verses 1 and 2 of the second poem! As I was considering this, to the forefront of my memory came something my son George said to me recently: "It isn't plagiarism if you are quoting from your own work!" God always sees to it that I have the information I need! In the third verse I acknowledged the shepherds, and then continued with the Magi's story, writing 2 or 3 verses a day.

Meanwhile, the sickness that had been spreading on my wing of the 4th floor suddenly reached me on **Sunday, January 6**, when I had several unusual coughing spells. Sandy, our nurse practitioner, ordered an x-ray, and started me on several medications, which I took for a week. The x-ray showed it to be bronchitis, not pneumonia. On Monday I notified my regular visitors that they should stay away from Sky View until I was well, and the quarantine that was keeping us confined to our floors (or rooms) was lifted. Now you know further what this past week was like. I did a lot of resting in my tilted chair, watching TV, taking medicine, trying to get well, devoid of visitors (except my husband Leo, who stayed away one day), giving thanks that I live in a facility that has a medical staff, meditating on and writing the poem, which I considered to be finished on **Wednesday, January 9**. I was eager to show it to George, but that couldn't happen until the quarantine was lifted.

Tuesday, January 22, 2013. George came on **Tuesday, January 15**, his regular time for visiting. He read the poem, obviously liked it, but also had some editorial questions. This was NOT what I had been anticipating, but as my editor, he made compelling cases for changing a word here, and a phrase, thought or line there. My son aims for clarity; that's my goal too! I was surprised to hear the current interpretation of words such as "meanwhile" and "ultimate." After several revisions, tonight we called the work done. Both of us are pleased with the end result, and give all glory to God!

In writing about the Magi, two additional fresh thoughts joined the two I mentioned before:

3. The connection between the death of the baby boys and the death of Jesus (in my mind right now I am preaching an evangelistic sermon called Death May Be Postponed, But It's Coming! referring, of course, to the escape to Egypt.) The part about the deaths of the infant boys was certainly made more poignant this year by the brutal shooting deaths of 20 first graders in Newtown, Connecticut in December, 2012.

4. The fact that right from the start Jesus came for everyone. That would make a great gospel sermon, too! These past few months God really HAS spoken to me from the manger, from the house, from the cross, and in my room, and the meditation has been sweet. Dear Lord, may the same be true for all who read these words. Amen.

Thursday, January 24, 2013. The third and final edition of Sky View's Horizons for 2012 was completed in December, but its distribution was delayed until early in January. About 10 days later, Diane and Elinor, the other two members of the editorial staff, came into my room and reported that this issue was being particularly well received. When I was putting the submissions into order for publication, I put a very positive one on page 1. It was written by my husband Leo, and I'd like to share it with you. After you read it, I will make some comments.

A Visitor's View of Sky View By Leo J. Kwiatkowski

During the month of December in 2005, I noticed a rapid deterioration of my wife Verna's strength and health while we were living in a senior residence in Peekskill. I notified my son George and daughter Marty that it was necessary to move their mother to a facility where she could be better cared for.

George, his wife Janet, and Marty began to visit nursing homes throughout northern Westchester and selected Sky View for Verna. I remember George telling me about the beautiful building with each room having a lovely view of the Hudson River and the fine room that was available for her.

My personal concern was not in the beauty of the building or the view but rather the in the care that my wife, their mother, would be receiving for the last few months of her life. That move into Sky View took place seven years ago – she has indeed been receiving the finest of care!

During the seven years of visiting Verna I have been able to enjoy the beauty of the building with continual revisions such as the extension of the side terrace and the construction of the front terrace. I love to watch the progressive changes of the flowers during the seasons in the island garden in front of the building.

But what I love best is the friendly, skilled, caring staff and the cheerfulness they exude while performing their functions. On every visit I am greeted with miles of smiles and friendly greetings beginning with the receptionist and then with anyone else I may encounter: nurses, aides, recreation staff, social workers, housekeepers, maintenance, and kitchen workers. To all of you I extend my deepest gratitude for your part in either caring for my wife's health or assisting to make her stay a very pleasant one.

Comments: This is my opportunity to speak in appreciation of my husband. Many people, including Leo, have expressed admiration for my acceptance of life in a nursing home with PLS. Knowing that my outlook and strength come from God, I can't help feeling that any believer has the same power within, to be activated only by setting our minds and hearts on things above. In the past nine years, since we left our house, Leo has been observing me in a different way, in new circumstances. As a result, he does NOT feel sorry for me! I am so glad, for I certainly do not pity myself. We both agree that I am where God wants me to be, doing the writing ministry that God meant for me to do.

But what about my husband? He envisioned the two of us doing a lot of traveling together in our old age, but in 2003 it became clear that this was not going to happen. He was reluctant to let our children sell the house and move us into a senior residence, but he did it! Good for him! As he says in his article, when I moved into Sky View two years later, he thought I was near death; he never dreamed he was about to join the hundreds – or thousands – of people in our country whose regular routine for many years has included visiting their spouses in nursing homes! But Leo has adapted well to the situation God has given him. I don't see any signs of complaining in his article; do you? One of the reasons he sees so many smiles and hears many friendly greetings in Sky View is that he genuinely returns them!

I remember telling him in September, 2006 that I was going to have monthly services at Sky View, starting in October. EAGERLY he volunteered to be a member of my presenting team, a role he has played well ever since then. Also, Leo plays an important role in his church while they look for a new pastor, serving as worship leader and sometimes preaching as well. I can easily see he, too, is just where God wants him to be, doing work that is part of a Plan. It is easy for us to be mutual encouragers, and that is also part of the Plan. God bless you, Leo!

Sunday, February 10, 2013. In January George noticed that I was having a hard time using my TV remote control. He thought perhaps the batteries needed to be replaced, but upon further examination decided to order a new one. George came into my room a week later, tried out the new remote, and pronounced the problem solved! As he handed the control to me, he grinned knowingly and said, "This is one thing you can't blame on the progression of your disease!" I smiled in agreement.

I imagine some of you who regularly read my Penny essays are expecting the word But or However to follow the previous paragraph, since I have reported that my hands, arms, and fingers have become more restricted – and you are correct. In fact, my difficulties with using the keyboard and mouse were among the topics I discussed with Helen Mayer, my case worker from the ALS society, when she came to visit me last week. Following the advice she received by phone from a technician at the ALS headquarters, Helen slowed down the action of my keyboard. As time goes on, I will see whether or not this helps me. She also described an alternate kind of mouse which my family will now provide for me to try out. Thanks, Helen!

These past two weeks have been focused on writing and then delivering the service for February. I wrote a new creative piece called The Lovingkindness Medley, in which Scriptures depicting lovingkindness are alternated with a lovingkindness refrain that is sung by everybody. It worked well at the service. Now I am writing one for March called The Lamb of God Medley. This medley has a spoken refrain that everyone will say

together. How I enjoy the worship materials God brings to my mind! God's Word will not return to him void. I am counting on that!

Tuesday, February 19, 2013. The residents of the 4th floor here at Sky View have been dealing with a series of personnel changes this month. First Ingrid, who was my evening aide for several years, left to work the morning shift on another floor. A few days later, Lucy, the evening nurse who worked on my wing of the floor, didn't show up when we expected her. Later on we discovered that, at her request, she would no longer be working a regular shift at Sky View. "They must have had their reasons," we'd say to each other, trying to alleviate our loss. Meanwhile, we had new workers to welcome to our floor!

Then a week ago Kathy, our nurse manager, came into my room to tell me she was being transferred to another floor, and the next day would be her last as our manager. As the news became known, a variety of emotions were expressed, from sadness to anger directed toward the administration for taking our beloved Kathy from us. The latter group began drafting a petition asking that she be allowed to stay with us. Fortunately, the next day – **Wednesday, February 13** – we had our regularly scheduled 4th floor meeting with Diane, our social worker, who had been told about the petition. The first thing we discussed at the meeting was Kathy's leaving. Diane listened to those who wanted to speak, including at least one person (age 101) who was at peace with the matter, and then tried to diffuse the emotionally charged room with rhetoric of her own. She spoke of the benefits of rotating the personnel in such a way that the change made sense. Diane made it seem as if Sky View also "had its reasons!" I wonder what would have happened if the talk had come first, and then the announcement. Would understanding have prevented the anger? If so, where would this understanding have come from? Who would have delivered the message, and how?

When situations such as these arise, I use them as opportunities to see if faith makes a difference in the way I react, because I certainly think it should! I want my inner environment (the way I THINK about what I believe) to be strong enough so that I recover quickly and well from any blows the outside environment might deliver to me. I know for sure that everything but God changes; that we don't know what will happen tomorrow, meaning: be prepared for change; that there is a time for everything, including a time to start working on the 4th floor and a time to stop working there; and that there is nothing new under the sun. Indeed, many times during the past 7 years I have had to say goodbye and let go of aides and nurses who left for various reasons, including sudden transfers. I remember when Kathy came to our floor, replacing another nurse manager whom we loved. All of these cases worked out well, their replacements giving us more people to know and to love.

Another belief ingrained within me is that we are to give thanks in all circumstances. If you practice this long enough, it becomes second nature, and truly thankful people are well on the way to rebounding from blows. As you may have guessed, I was not upset as I sat in the meeting listening and processing while others spoke. Also, I did not sign the petition, while not criticizing those who did. Diane reminds us that as residents, we have rights. True, but then, as I see it, so does Sky View! I chose to accept this change as a chance for my faith to grow. I am primarily in the hands of God, and secondarily in the hands of Sky View. I have no complaints about how either one is treating me!

Tuesday, March 5, 2013. More opportunity to practice peace! We are scheduled to have our March service on the 7th, less than 2 days from now. Everything is ready, BUT – a winter storm is predicted for tomorrow, lasting until Friday: George is sick and may not be able to come; and my email device has not been working since last Friday, so I don't know if other team members have been trying to reach me about being unavailable. Hopefully the Mailbug should be back in operation tomorrow. I have no idea how all this will work out, but God does! Whether we have a service or not, I will practice being at peace.

Friday, March 8, 2013. The story, continued: On Wednesday afternoon a worker from the maintenance department came to check my phone system, and found that a new part needed to be installed into the wall. After that was accomplished, it wasn't long before my Mailbug, which works through the phone line, was functioning again! There were 5 email messages waiting, and, I was happy to note, none of them were from worship team members.

Thursday morning I awoke to find that the first part of the winter storm had bypassed us: there had been no snow! Then about 11 AM snow flurries began swirling around outdoors, heavily at times, though never accumulating, due to the relatively mild temperature. The squalls lasted until noon and then – they were over. It was then that I realized we were going to have a service; it would NOT be canceled. I told myself the butterflies that were fluttering around inside me were simply signs of the excitement I always felt when the first Thursday rolls around, and were allowable, rather than signs of unrest that should be expelled. How easy it is to rationalize! :)

When I got downstairs, I found the team busily setting up the room, with space for me to park my chair. All were there except George, who was still sick. The program consisted mainly of The Lamb of God Medley, written for this service. At the conclusion, one resident told me that we had brought Christ to her and she was so happy about that! I was happy also, for that is our intention.

When I awoke today I found that the second part of the storm had deposited 4 to 6 inches of snow over our area. The view from my window was "snow" pretty, to use a term Marty coined when writing to me about our previous storm. Yesterday and today are both days that the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in them!

Sunday, March 17, 2013. Here I am, all dressed in green, my way of acknowledging St. Patrick's Day. Spring officially arrives this week, and Easter is only 2 weeks away. Time continues to move rapidly for me here in Sky View! In preparing for Easter and the April service I read again the account of the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, and was struck by the similarities between then and now. The purpose is the same: getting the gospel into all the world, and the power is the same: the Holy Spirit. The human beings that God uses, then and now, are those who are not only believers, but are devoted to God and his purposes. A friend of mine used the phrase "living in love with God" in a recent email. I like that! Surely it describes the 120 or so people who were gathered in a house in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit gave each of them such ability to speak that 3,000 devout Jews from all around the world, visiting in

Jerusalem for Pentecost, believed the message and took it home with them! Who but God could think of such an excellent plan!

God is again bringing people from all the world into places such as Sky View. In Acts 2, fifteen different countries or languages are named as being gathered in Jerusalem at the time, and no doubt there were others as well. At Sky View, on a daily basis, people from India, China, Mexico, Columbia, Chili, Jamaica, Haiti, other Caribbean islands, Nigeria, Rwanda, Ghana, and other places, all gather to take care of those who reside here. I find this to be interesting! Our nation – the world! – is changing. There is movement going on; we need to discern the rhythm of what God is doing in this world he loves so much, and keep in step with it. What an opportunity to present and live the gospel!

At the same time, FROM my room, by using the World Wide Web, it is possible for my writings to reach anywhere in the world, amazing thought! Now more than ever it is impossible to know how many people we are influencing for Christ, and how. Let's be what God wants us to be, do what he wants us to do, and let God handle the results.

Sunday, March 31, 2013. EASTER! Here I am, all dressed in lavender, appropriate for today, sitting in my room in front of my computer, fondly recalling the wonderful Easter service that George and the team presented here this afternoon, and needing to conclude this Penny so I can do some editing and writing for Sky View's Horizons, our magazine that we hope to print in April. I am excited because a helpful idea that will facilitate both projects just occurred to me, for which I thank the Lord. I had a lengthy entry dated March 23 that I wrote for this journal, thinking it would also be a good article for Horizons. The idea was to cut the entry from this Penny, thus keeping it from being far too long, and using it to open Penny 31. What a relief this is! So now I will say goodbye for now, and hope to see you in Penny 31, which is well underway! Proverbs 3:5,6. Love, Verna.

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Verna Kwiatkowski

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