

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 31

(APRIL – JUNE, 2013)

Tuesday, April 9, 2013. Hello, Everyone! Welcome to Penny 31. The April service is over and went well. George read my new poem, *On This Side of the Cross*, at both the Easter and the April services. Then I spent several days writing and editing for Sky View's Horizons, and now I have time to begin this issue of my journal. As promised in Penny 30, I am going to start with a story that took place in March. Here it is:

Saturday, March 23, 2013. I had an unexpected adventure yesterday and today. As she was giving me my morning medications, our nurse Tanya noticed that my 11-month-old feeding tube, that had served me so well, was leaking. She informed Michelle, our nurse manager, who called Dr. Martin for an appointment. Then she contacted Janet, who arranges transportation, and in a short time Tanya returned with the news that I would be picked up for the trip to the hospital at 1:00. That was amazingly fast! I thought we might wait until Monday! What's more, Tanya had already arranged for Tania, one of our aides who often assists me, to be my traveling companion. I looked forward to being with her.

Though I had expected to be transported on a stretcher, I asked my aide Elizabeth to put me in my chair after she got me dressed, so I could handle some business before I left. Then came some welcome news: an ambulette was being sent rather than an ambulance. Since ambulettes are equipped to transport chairs, I could remain in mine for the trip; I would be transferred to a bed at the hospital, if necessary. I cancelled my appointments for the day, and at 1:00 Tania, the driver, and I were on our way to the hospital!

Once there, things ran smoothly, although I couldn't understand why I wasn't put into bed, since I was thoroughly expecting to be put to sleep for an endoscopic exchange. When Dr. Martin arrived, he told me that a bedside exchange, which does not require anesthesia, would be safer than the other way. I agreed to go along with his advice. So I moved my chair to the place he indicated, tilted back, and about 5 minutes later the whole procedure was done! "You're ready to go home," he said. And that brings us to Part 2 of my adventure!

Tania and I needed two things before we could leave: completed paperwork and transportation home. For both we were dependent on the hospital. Then began a long wait – a perfect opportunity to practice God's peace! What a waste of emotional energy it would have been to get all upset and frustrated! Finally the paperwork was done and transportation had been ordered. More waiting time followed.

It was after 5:00 when two men arrived – with a stretcher! They were just as surprised to see me in my chair as I was to see the stretcher! Turns out the hospital had wrongly ordered an ambulance for me. Again, an opportunity to practice peace! Finally we decided that I would go home in the ambulance and the hospital would get the chair to Sky View. Tania brought with us the headrest and the left armrest, parts that had to be removed to transfer me to the stretcher. We got back to Sky View at 5:45, and a few minutes later I was in bed, with my aide Andrea tending to me. I was going to be in bed for a long time, but I had no choice!

The Wonderful Conclusion! This morning, when Elizabeth came to get me up, I asked if my chair had arrived. She found that it had not, but that men from here were going to the hospital to pick it up. I was dressed and lying on my bed when Kevin, from the maintenance department, and Nuno, from housekeeping, rolled the chair into my room about 1:30. While they reunited my chair with its head- and armrests, they told me a remarkable story.

As I understand it, Kevin was the only staff member from his department working today who was available to go get my chair, but he needed help. So he called Nuno, who was at his home an hour away. When Nuno heard about the situation, he came to Sky View on his day off to help get my chair back. What a labor of love!

Suddenly the whole room seemed to be filled with love. Besides the men, Lucy, from housekeeping, who was there delivering my laundry, also chimed in with endearing sentiments, as did the 1 or 2 others who were there. No wonder I like living at Sky View. What a caring staff! Thank you, my friends! And thank you, Lord!

Monday, April 15, 2013. ON TURNING EIGHTY. I have a feeling this may turn into an essay, and maybe a poem as well. I'm going to begin writing in this journal and see what happens. On the 18th of April I will be 80! By the time I finish this entry, my birthday will be in the past, yet I won't be breaking up the narrative with current dates. The same is true of anything lengthy that I write.

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The first Bible verse that came to my mind about turning 80 was Psalm 90:10 – *"The length of our days is 70 years – or 80, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away."* This verse is NOT a promise from God that each of us should live at least 70 years, nor does it say that 80 years is all we get. My parents were both in their mid-90s when they died, and many people here at Sky View are 95 or older, including one who is 106! The author of this Psalm is Moses, who died when he was 120. I wonder how old he was when he wrote this verse? It seems to me it would have been written by someone less than 70 who thought his time on earth might end around 80. If that is true, Moses certainly was mistaken! He was 80 when he had his encounter with God at the burning bush that was NOT consumed; little did he know that his final chapter in the service of God would be the most productive 40 years in his entire life!

I certainly agree with Moses that the years quickly pass. How do you feel about that? Where did my 80 years go? Moses, who was intensely connected with God, put some interesting points to ponder about Time at the beginning of Psalm 90. Listen:

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. You sweep people away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning – though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.

We know that time only SEEMS to go faster for older people than for the young, due to an experience that could be called “being full of years.” Imagine, then, how time passes for God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, who has experienced all the years that ever were or ever will be! No wonder Moses said that with the Lord a thousand years are like a day or even less: like a watch in the night! Isn’t it marvelous to know that, while God COULD overlook us, as no more important than grass that quickly withers, or a vapor that soon disappears, instead God treats us as if we were so very valuable, even worth dying for? On the other hand, a DAY for God can also be as a thousand years, we are told elsewhere, as he walks with each of his children through our minutes, hours, days, babyhood, childhood, our teenage years, adulthood, middle age, and finally, old age. Over and over again God experiences Time with us. At the same time, while still on earth, we are invited to experience Eternity with God! Maybe that’s why Time seems to fly on some days and crawl on others!

All this brings me to another point that I have been pondering. It started recently when a friend surmised that it must have been hard for me to leave my house in 2004. I had no idea what he meant, so he clarified: “I mean to leave the memories.” Then I could shake my head, for that had not occurred to me. In the first place, my memories are inside my mind; I took them with me when we moved. In the second place, I had deliberately adopted a plan while my children were small that I thought would keep me free from having regrets when they were grown. Obviously, it worked! Here is a summary of my plan:

1. Enjoy your children every day of their lives, no matter how old they are. If you do, you will waste no energy wishing they were younger, even babies again. My three sons and two daughters all are middle aged now, and for a long time I have enjoyed them as equals, as friends, as co-workers in the gospel, for we are all adults. Now you know why I didn’t have any trouble leaving the house: my children had moved out long ago! As for my grandchildren, two of them are teenagers, and the other nine are adults, and that’s the way I think of them – NEVER as “my babies”!

2. Live in the present, facing the future, with the past behind you. Let the Lord, who is our Rear Guard, be in charge of the past, so that occasional visits there will not harm you. Living in the present means facing reality, accepting your age and condition as it is. It means living one day at a time, with every day being Today: *This is the day that the Lord has made*. Let’s rejoice, be glad, and give thanks in it, no matter what the circumstances! Facing the future means setting your minds and hearts on things above, especially looking forward to Heaven, your home when life on earth ends. Believers have SO MUCH to look forward to!

If you have gathered that I don’t mind being 80, you are correct! My life has been an adventure with God, and the best is yet to come! Amen.

Monday, April 29, 2013. A week ago today I noticed something curious and startling on the control panel of my chair: the batteries had lost all their charge! Of the 10 levels of charge shown by a column of lights (3 red at the bottom, 4 yellow in the middle, and 3 green on top, probably a standard code) only the lowest red light was on, and it was blinking. I was able to move about with the one light blinking, though I didn’t know what would happen if the last light went out, especially if I were tilted at the time! I did every-

thing I could think of: I notified my daughter Marty by email; informed my nurses of the problem; and asked my aide to recharge the chair while I reclined in it, watching TV.

Things looked hopeful after the recharging experiment: all 10 lights were on! Then, less than a minute after the chair was unplugged, I witnessed a memorable sight: starting from the top and progressing quickly to the bottom, every light went out in turn except the last one – and it was blinking! It reminded me so much of the falling of a chain of dominos that had been carefully set on end, or the repeated forward somersaults of a skilled gymnast. It also let me know that something serious was wrong. An email from Marty stating that she had contacted a repair company ended the day in high hopes for me. The last time she did that, the man who came was an excellent mechanic. I looked forward to having him handle this problem, too.

What a wonderful message my MailBug brought me last Tuesday morning: Marty said that help was coming around 5:30! All I had to do was relax in my room until then. We have a shift change at Sky View at 3:00. On this day the unusual chatter from the incoming staff indicated that something was wrong. I found out that my aide and one of the nurses had not arrived yet. At 3:30 my aide, Andrea, arrived, and told us that an overturned tractor trailer had closed the main highway that leads to our building. Fortunately, Andrea knew another way of getting here, though taking that route made her late. The nurse was not so fortunate. She called to say that she couldn't get here, and returned home. Short staff = Stress on the floor!

When 5:30 came – and went – with no repairman arriving, I began to wonder if he, too, had been hindered by the traffic problem! Thinking I might have to wait until the next day for him to come, I tilted my chair as far as it goes (to relieve the pressure on my body that comes from sitting all day), and prepared to watch TV all evening. That's where I was at 7:45 when a man rolled his wheelchair into my room and said, "We're late, but help is here!" He was followed by a man and a woman, to whom he spoke in Spanish. This was FAR from what I had been expecting, and of course, I couldn't talk with them. Sensing that I was about to bring my chair down, the man asked me to keep it up, as it was in a perfect position for them to change the batteries. I was both relieved and surprised: relieved that there was a solution to the problem, and surprised when the WOMAN reached into the toolkit and began working on the chair's undercarriage. Begone, stereotypes!

Just then George arrived for his Tuesday visit. It was obvious to me that Marty and he had communicated, for he was not surprised to find the team at work. What was NOT obvious to me until just now as I am typing this, is how GOD brought us all together at the same time to work all things out for our good, but he did – and my heart overflows with thanksgiving! An hour or so after they arrived, my chair had two new, fully charged batteries, completely installed by the woman, and a new charger, too. In addition, the man in the wheelchair had completely reset the 5 speeds on my chair, according to my specifications. And George was there – to interpret my wishes to the team; to sign papers; to ask questions; to let them know how much we appreciated them, with words and a tip; and to lead them out of the building, for it was locked by the time they left. After that, George visited with me briefly, and then my Sky View team came to bring to a conclusion another good day.

Friday, May 10, 2013. Yesterday Volume 1, 2013 of our magazine, Sky View's Horizons, was distributed by Diane, our Director of Social Work. Diane, Elinor (a volunteer with Social Work who interviews people, gathers material, writes, and types), and I, (by editing, and contributing articles), are the three who are responsible for getting the magazine published. Of course many others contribute as well, including those who print and staple the pages, and those whose stories are told. This issue was eagerly awaited for by some residents and staff, and now wonderful comments are coming from both. May this project continue to encourage and bring pleasure!

On one of the pages we have 19 Haiku poems written by a group of residents who met with our psychologist over a period of time "to explore personal feelings through the creative process of Haiku – a Japanese form of poetry. In English, the Haiku is traditionally written as three lines in a 5 syllable, 7 syllable, 5 syllable format" (quoted from Sky View's Horizons). As I was thinking about these things, a desire to try out the format blended with the sentimentality of the times (Mother's Day is this Sunday, and Father's Day is coming in 5 weeks), and produced the following series of Haiku-style poems:

A GIFT OF LOVE

By Verna Kwiatkowski. Sky View. Inspired by the Haiku poems recently published in our magazine called Sky View's Horizons.

This gift of love comes
Down through the generations,
Wrapped up in God's love.

My mother and dad
Did the very best they could:
They raised us with love.

William and Florence
Were the names of my parents.
I am glad they met!

They gave birth to three –
Verna, Harold, and Robert.
Bob and I remain.

Leo and I had
Five children, both boys and girls.
We loved ev'ry one!

Now we watch how they
Love THEIR children, and rejoice!
Love is ev'rywhere!

Love is eternal.
People are born; people die,
But the love remains!

Friday, May 17, 2013. AN AUDIENCE OF ONE. What a delightful experience I had this afternoon! I was reclining in my chair when Casey, our director of activities, came into my room and asked if I would like a visit from her friend, The Magician. Correctly interpreting my smiling and nodding, she ushered in a young man who smiled his way right into my heart.

His first trick involved a deck of cards, which I was sure was a specialty deck, although it looked ordinary. When he asked me to pick a card from the deck, Casey had to help me withdraw the one I chose, for that is a very difficult action for my fingers at this point. The patter that the magician used as he worked on the deck was tailor-made for me, and when he “magically” produced my card from the pack, I laughed out loud!

For the second trick, he used small spongy balls, one of which he enclosed in my hand. After moving the balls around in a smooth routine, he ended up with one ball missing. Then he asked me to open my hand and – Surprise! – there were two balls in it! The illusion was excellent, again bringing laughter.

Finally, he called my attention to his shoes, one of which was untied. “It’s not safe to walk around with your laces untied,” he said, and I agreed with him. Then he stamped that foot a few times and the laces seemed to tie themselves! I was amazed, never having seen a trick like that before! All three of us were smiling as the two of them left to find their next private audience. I caught enough of their parting conversation to think he enjoyed performing for me as much as I enjoyed having him!

P.S.: Today is Monday, May 20. As I finish my story, I find that the joy I felt on Friday is still fresh within me. In fact, it is greater, as it is now mixed with gratitude. Thank you, thank you, Casey and Friend!

Saturday, June 1, 2013. Hello again! I feel like I am on vacation now! I finished writing the service for June on Thursday, and our next service is scheduled for August! – two months from now! When I noticed earlier in the year that the first Thursday fell on July 4th, I decided to skip that month and let the activities department plan something patriotic for the day. I need the rest that this decision will provide.

I had allergy problems again this week. Sandy, our nurse practitioner, ordered a chest x-ray, not wanting any possible pneumonia to go undetected. The report said no pneumonia or any other kind of infection was found in my lungs. My coughing is subsiding now, though it never goes completely away. I’m glad it’s not contagious!

Wednesday, June 5, 2013. What a pleasant surprise I had at 2:00 this morning! I awoke to find that my aide for the night was Tina, an aide I hadn’t seen since she was transferred to another floor several years ago. Sometimes aides are asked to float to a different floor to equalize the staff for the shift. This was the happy circumstance that brought Tina into my room last night. We were so glad to see each other!

The visit became even more special when Tina asked if I had any writings that she could have. She remembered – and my heart was flooded with thanksgiving to God! I may have told you that I had a rack placed on the back of my desk last year that serves as a

shelf on which I put the writings that people may take. I pointed Tina to this place, and she took the essay and 3 poems that were available to her. She carefully folded the papers, looking forward to reading them later. All glory to God, who orchestrates time, people, and things so beautifully!

Friday, June 14, 2013. What an exciting week I have had, mostly in my room at the computer! It began last Saturday morning, June 8. My regular aide was off for the weekend, and, as frequently happens, I had Harvar instead. When it comes time to put me on the Sara Lift, 2 people from the staff must be present, so Harvar called in a woman I vaguely remembered from a long time ago. (Turned out her name is Andrea, so I added her to the growing list of women I know with that name.) Andrea recalled reading some of my writings, and then gave me an assignment. In two weeks she was going to attend a women's conference, she said, and she wanted me to write a poem of encouragement for women that she could hand out to everyone who attends. That was quite an order, but I strongly felt that God was behind this.

As soon as I was in my chair I went to my computer and began to type, thankful that I had the time to devote to such a wonderful project! For many, many years I have been thinking, reading, musing, teaching, and preaching on this subject, and it was fun to watch my ideas sort themselves out and pop up on the screen. Toward the end of her shift, Andrea came back to my room with a list of topics I might consider when writing. I, in turn, showed her the first verse, which I had already written. Then we both knew that this was a serious project, and not a casual whim. She said Thursday would be her next time at Sky View, and she would pick it up then, adding when she saw my reaction, "or do you need more time?"

I worked on the poem daily, and finished it on Thursday. It turned out to be my longest poem ever: 8 verses with 8 lines each, with substantial Scripture passages at the beginning and the end. When Andrea did not come yesterday I figured she was giving me more time. Even if she never comes, of this I'm sure: GOD was the one who gave me this assignment, and I'm glad I followed through! By the time you get this Penny, it will be on my website. Look for it – it's called "In the Image of God."

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On Wednesday, in the midst of my project, Helen Mayer, from the ALS Society, paid me a visit, and brought me wonderful news! She said when my hands and fingers can no longer type, I can continue to write by using my eyes! "You won't miss a beat," she said, and then went on to describe the process. She wants me to begin practicing soon, so I will be ready when the time comes. I was SO PLEASED that, with my emotions mangled by PLS, I cried! "Were you worried?" Helen asked. "Apparently I was," I replied.

Saturday, June 29, 2013. It's time to conclude another issue of Penny. These past 2 weeks have brought a flurry of activities, projects, and people into my life. I will mention some of them, and then close. Two unforeseen things happened last Saturday, one of them bringing much laughter. First of all, when my aide was preparing to get me out of bed, she got hold of my gown and, in one sweeping motion, not only straightened my garment, but pulled out my feeding tube as well! Both of us were shocked, of course, and the aide was so upset! She told the nurse supervisor, who soon came and installed

a temporary tube so the opening to my stomach wouldn't close before a new tube could be put in by my doctor the next week. I was glad to know that Sky View could handle situations like this! But the greatest thing was being able to comfort my aide. I have known her for years, but never so intimately as then. We held hands and prayed. Then, using my Lightwriter, I told her not to feel bad, that God is in control, and similar truths that I live by. In the end she was SO comforted that she was radiant, all glory to God, and I thought how privileged I was to share this incident with her!

The second incident occurred in the early evening when another shift of workers was here. The nurse gave me medicine through the temporary tube, and when she left, she closed my door in the latch! Effectively, then, I was locked in my room, for there is no way I can open my door. When I rang the call bell, my aide Andrea came with Lily to see what I wanted. Andrea knew right away that I wanted the door to be opened, but when she tried to do so, the handle and the other hardware parts fell onto the hallway floor. A few seconds later the inner handle and parts crashed onto the floor of my room, leaving a hole in the door. Andrea said to me through the hole, "Don't worry, Verna. We'll get you out!" I smiled. Certainly I was not worried! I don't know what they did, but finally the door stood wide open and the gathered hardware pieces were safely stashed on my bookcase. "We'll notify maintenance," they said.

Later on Andrea came back to get me ready for bed. When Lily arrived, she slammed the door shut as usual, for my door swings open unless it is completely closed. From inside the bathroom I heard the "click" and began to chuckle. "Oh, no! Have we locked ourselves in?" Andrea said. "Listen to Verna cracking up; she knew before we did!" My PLS laugh (loud and contagious) took over as the farce continued, until all 3 of us felt the healing power of laughter. Then Andrea, using scissors as a tool, got the door open, and Lily taped the latch so it could not close me in again.

RESOLUTION: The next day a man from maintenance fixed the handle; service with a smile! And on Friday, June 28, I got a tube exchange from Dr. Martin at the hospital. (In case you are wondering, there is no pain involved in this type of tube exchange, nor did it hurt when the aide pulled the tube out.) This time I went by ambulance on a stretcher both ways, and there was clear evidence that God was in charge of every detail! With this, I am going to close Penny 31 and save all other points for the next issue. God bless you all.

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Verna Kwiatkowski

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