

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 33

(OCTOBER – DECEMBER, 2013)

Monday, October 7, 2013. Hello again! Just a few days ago I was finishing Penny 32, and now a whole clean document appears on my computer screen, waiting to see what I will write on its pages. Amazing! And the adventure goes on!

In Penny 32 I mentioned some of the visits I have been having, both with new people and with friends from long ago. I want to continue that list in this issue, beginning with Charlotte, a 101-year-old lady who resides on the 4th floor at Sky View, like I do. I wrote about her before, several years ago, when she moved from her large private room to a smaller one across the hall. With confident assurance she said at the time: “This is the last move I will be making until the Lord calls me Home!”

In the past month Charlotte has formed a new habit at this rapidly accelerating phase of her journey Home: She comes to my room almost daily to pay me a brief visit, which I welcome! Propelling her wheelchair with her feet, she knocks on my open door, and then comes in, greeting me with a beautiful smile. As I wheel around to face her, she says she won't stay long, and then makes a few entirely appropriate comments. (I say this because Charlotte has been going in and out of reality in recent months. I find it interesting that she is always “in the present” when she is in my room.) Next she wishes me a pleasant evening and a good night's sleep. She tells me she loves me and blows me a kiss, which I return as best I can. We smile at each other as she turns around, and then leaves.

While writing about Charlotte, I recalled a time this summer when she entered my room in distress. It was a Sunday afternoon, and in the day room many residents were watching an opera on the big screen TV. In the lobby adjacent to the day room, Charlotte could not escape from the music, which was making her more and more nervous. This was the story she told me when she arrived, adding that she thought she could find peace in my room. I must admit that for a moment I wished I could talk when Charlotte said that. I wanted so much to assure her that she was welcome to stay as long as she wanted to, but she has lost the ability to read or hear my Lightwriter. So I smiled, nodded, and waved my hand to make her feel welcome. She left about 5 minutes later; perhaps that's all the time she needed for God's peace to embrace her. The opera ended soon after that. *Lord, may all who enter my room find your peace awaiting them. Amen.*

Saturday, October 12, 2013. Our service this month was held on **Thursday, October 3.** The “congregation” was large that day, and the participation in the songs and readings was very good. The theme was Lifestyle Decisions, based on a new song I am writing by the same name. Prior to the service a planned reunion took place: Nan Ernst and I saw each other face to face for the first time in at least 15 years. Nan had lost track of me after her women's group, where I sometimes served as speaker, disbanded. Frank Hetzer, a member of our worship team, was the person God used to reconnect us. What a delight!

Two days ago I had a wonderful visit from Blanche and Mary, members of the church Leo attends and the Bible study he teaches. They said they had been to see me once before, but it was so long ago that I did not recognize them, so I am counting them as new friends. Then this past week a mass-mailing mistake by an email company reconnected me with my cousin Kimberly in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, after a lack of contact in recent years. Can you see God's fingerprints over this story, as I do? Both of us agree that this "mistake" was a good one! :)

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Last evening Kayan, my aide, came up to me in the lobby and said, "How's Bob?" My face showed how completely puzzled I was. I knew no one at Sky View named Bob! Laughing aloud, she left, soon returning with the newly distributed issue of Sky View's Horizons in her hand. She turned to the page that contained a poem I had written about my family in Japanese haiku style. Pointing to the line that says "Bob and I remain," she repeated her question: "I want to know: How is Bob?" How clever of Kayan to ask about my brother as she did!

After sharing a laugh, I began to type. "Bob is fine," I said, and then continued to tell her some of the following, which I also want to share with you who are reading this. My brother lives in Maryland with his wife Esther. Both retired as of this year, and they are looking forward to the freedom and adventure that retirement brings. They are about to embark on the first of 2 trips that they have already planned. I wish them God's blessing as they start out together on this phase of their lives.

Now that you know this story, I thought you might like to read the poem:

A GIFT OF LOVE

*By Verna Kwiatkowski. Sky View. A poem
in the Japanese Haiku style – 3 lines in a
5 syllable, 7 syllable, 5 syllable format.*

A 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!

Monday, October 14, 2014. Finally the day arrived: Noel visited me in my room today! In case you don't know who she is, here is a brief summary of our relationship. Noel is a Catholic nun who lives in the nursing home section of the Maryknoll complex about 15 minutes from here. She also has Primary Lateral Sclerosis, as I do. We have been emailing each other for over a year, introduced by Helen Mayer, the caseworker from the ALS Association that we share. In July we had our first meeting when my friend Carolyn Burke and I went to Maryknoll. Now it was her turn to visit me!

Carolyn arrived first, eager to see Noel again, willing to help me talk. When Noel came, she was not in her power chair, as I had supposed, but in a transport chair pushed by Marianne, a member of Maryknoll's activities staff. They had just entered my room when Noel announced that she had just celebrated her 87th birthday! She doesn't mind if I tell you, for she considers that to be an achievement!

The four of us easily chatted for over an hour and a half, until our guests had to leave. At my request, Noel brought with her a short biography, which Marianne read aloud, and a selection of her poems, including some printed in the form of a spiral-bound book. Part way into our visit, Marianne said, "I know why you two get along so well – you are kindred spirits!" And indeed we are! One of the striking similarities was an early sense of vocation, a destiny, a reason for being here. From her biography, here is Noel's description of God's call to her.

[God's] call came to me when I was four or five years old. My Mother had taken my twin and me to meet my brothers and sisters at the end of their school day. Several St. Joseph Sisters leaned over us as we sat in our baby carriage, and the thought came to me, "I want to be one of those some day." I had no idea what "one of those" was! However the thought remained with me – a call from God who inspires the thoughts of our hearts. A few years later in the fifth grade I read a book about the Jesuit Martyrs of North America. I knew then I wanted to be a missionary!

My own story starts when I was six, and in the first grade. (This was my first year of school, as my town had no kindergarten in those days.) During the year I had a strong sense that I was meant to teach, that some day I would be a teacher, like Miss Evans. That feeling never left me, except briefly when I was 15 and thought I might become a nurse. As with Noel, the fifth grade was important to me also, for it was Mrs. Loose who recognized and encouraged the teacher qualities in me. She used to say, "Some day, Verna, you will come back from college and replace me in the classroom!" When the school year was coming to an end, Mrs. Loose gave me a gift that warms my heart even now, as I think about it: she gave me an unused teacher's record book, two new marking

pencils, one with red lead, one with blue, and a few well worn books from her personal library collection kept in the back of her room. That gift stoked my imagination for years!

Both of us became teachers, and Noel became a missionary to China, fulfilling her heart's desire. My experience of God inspiring the thoughts of my heart and later fulfilling them, came in the mid-1970s. As my family was driving to church one Sunday, we listened on the car radio to a preacher giving a gospel message. Thinking he could have done better, I suddenly found myself saying loudly, "I want to preach!" That must have seemed strange to those in the car, since we attended a church that did not allow women to preach or teach, if there were men around. So I went on to explain: "I don't mean I want to be a regular preacher. What I really want is to hold a two-week gospel campaign, giving a clear gospel message every evening. Fifteen years after that, I actually did become pastor of a church, and preached every Sunday. And five years after that, God arranged that I should meet an Egyptian man who invited me to come to Cairo to hold a two week gospel campaign! That was pure delight!

Thursday, October 17, 2013. OOPS! I had an incident yesterday that was both scary and potentially dangerous. I want to record it because one of the main purposes of my journal is to track my PLS as it slowly but surely shuts my body down. For a couple of years I have been the only one in Sky View who drives a power chair, and I have the reputation of being a good driver. If I live long enough, the time will come when it will no longer be safe for me drive my chair anymore, whether from PLS or from advancing age. I am confident that if that time comes, God's grace will be sufficient for me, just as it was when I stopped driving a car, and when I first sat in a wheelchair, no longer able to walk. Meanwhile, I am very careful!

Yesterday's incident took place at my desk, which is really a long table that holds my computer and other things. When I am using the computer, the controls for my chair are under the desk, out of sight. I do not turn off my chair, but leave it in the drive mode, ready for me to back it out when I am finished typing. This time I thought the controls were a little high, so I reached under the table and, sight unseen, changed the chair into the tilt mode and lowered it somewhat. When I was ready to leave, I took hold of the knob on the controls and pulled back, expecting the chair likewise to move back. Instead, being in the tilt mode, it moved upward, and continued to move upward, since the knob was now stuck in a pulled back position. The table began to tip and the computer and other things began to slide, while under the table my knees were hurting from the pressure. I screamed, and an aide came running in immediately. A nurse and another aide soon followed. Together, the 3 women got me out of my predicament, with redness on both my knees as the only sign that something had happened. When the evening nurse checked my knees, even the redness had gone. Gratitude and caution, however, live on! Thank you, Lord!

Saturday, November 16, 2013. At our service on November 7, we had some first-time visitors: Noel, Sr. Carolyn, who drove Noel here from Maryknoll, and my friend Carolyn Burke. It was wonderful worshipping God together with them, and all the others gathered in our Main Living Room. Another foretaste of Heaven!

And then 2 days later – a week ago today – I had such a satisfying reunion visit with my cousin Kimberly! She and her friend Tom took the train from Lancaster, PA, just to spend

4 hours with me. George came to visit with us for about half an hour in the afternoon. The years rolled away as we talked and laughed together. You would never have guessed from hearing us that I am 25 years older than she! We related as contemporaries, as daughters of siblings, as friends, for that is what we are!

Sunday, December 8, 2013. In November Leo took a train ride to North Carolina to spend a week with our son David, his wife Dana, and their adult children: Paul, John, and Amy. While he was gone, my brother Bob and his wife Esther got on the train in Maryland and came up North to NYC where they took in a show and had a dinner visit with Marty. The next day they boarded a Metro-North train, got off at Croton-Harmon, and spent a few hours visiting with me! Afterwards they went all the way back to Maryland by train.

Speaking of trains – you may have heard of the Metro-North train that crashed Sunday morning, December 1, killing 4 and injuring many. George told me he was on that train 3 Sundays in November, but not on December 1. Interpret that as you will. To me, it's a reminder that we never know what a day may bring. That's why we should say "Lord willing" when making our plans. How WONDERFUL to know that even DEATH cannot separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Sunday, December 15, 2013. There'll be some changes made! Things cannot go on as usual while my body restricts my movements more and more. Right now, when seated in my chair, I can stretch my arms forward about 6 inches, just enough to propel my chair, and the same distance to the side. The list of things I can no longer do gets longer all the time. I must be careful here, for I am heading into uncharted territory. My desire to finish well the race God has set out for me has not diminished; I want to honor my Lord, who honored me so IMMENSELY when he died as a sacrifice for my sins on the cross. I'll tell you more about the changes in the final pages of this Penny.

Wednesday, December 25, 2013. CHRISTMAS DAY! Right now, here at Sky View, the special Christmas dinner is being held. Each resident was allowed to invite 2 guests to eat with them. I imagine the dining room is crowded with happy diners eating a meal that I'm sure is delicious. Meanwhile, in nearby Peekskill, Marty and Ed are hosting a Christmas brunch for George's family and Leo. I'm sure their house is filled with love as well as good food. And here I am, quite content to be in my room with God my Savior, writing to you, and basking in the afterglow of the special Christmas service we gave on Sunday the 22nd. I am all dressed in green at my request (even my bib is green!), and on my left shoulder is a special Christmas pin that Marty reminded me to wear. The pin, consisting of 3 red plastic bells hanging from a ceramic arrangement of holly leaves and berries, with the center bell being larger than the ones on the sides, was given to me by Mrs. Ellingboe in 1956, when both of us were faculty members at Ochoa Elementary School in Tucson, Arizona. What wonderful memories that pin unleashes every time I see it! My dear first graders are now in their mid-60s! I have a current picture of one of my Ochoa students, Adelina Salcido, on my bulletin board here at Sky View, for Adelina and I have kept in touch ever since I left Arizona to get married in 1957!

As before, George planned the entire special Christmas service by alternating the well-known Christmas carols with various writings I have contributed through the years. All I

did this year was write a new meditation, which George used and which Marty put on my website. It turned out that the team members and I were not the only ones who were looking forward to the service. When I arrived, about half an hour early, people were already gathering, including family groups who were planning to take in the service with their resident loved one. I chose to sit with the audience rather than behind the podium with the team, which put me in position for a very pleasant surprise: Noel arrived from Maryknoll and was wheeled to sit beside me! I had forgotten that there was the possibility of her coming. Using her Boogie Board, Noel told me that Sr. Carolyn was parking the car. Later on, Carolyn greeted me warmly, and then took a seat behind us. As the “congregation” continued to gather, a problem arose that we had never faced before: we ran out of chairs! In the end, at least 2 men stood and Leo sat on the window ledge!

As a handout, George had made a 3-page packet with the words of the carols, attached by a staple in the upper left corner. The first time we had to turn the page, I noticed how easily Noel completed the task that, for me, was extremely difficult. So I tried to hand my papers over to Noel, expecting her to turn the page and hand them back to me. Instead, she took my handout and gave me hers, quickly finding the right page for herself. From her position behind us, Carolyn noticed our transaction, and when the time came for turning to page 3, she appeared at my side just in time to do the job for me. I enjoyed this interchange among the 3 of us, which began with a need and ended with so much shared love and understanding!

My team is just as committed to working with George as they are with me, which is not surprising, since we are all working under God’s leadership and for his glory. The team members that were available on the 22nd were Earl, Leo, Cliff, Frank, Marilyn, and Barbara, each doing what George asked them to do. In addition, 2 of George’s sons were there and took part: Eric, who lives and works in Manhattan, and Andrew, who was home from college. In my room after the service, George told me that his son Evan, who lives and works in Denver, Colorado, had planned to play his trumpet on some of the carols at Sky View, but before he flew East an emergency in Evan’s church resulted in his staying in Denver. That’s why we say “Lord willing” when making plans, right? I believe God’s kingdom is strengthened by the things we intend to do for God but are prevented from doing, as in this example, as well as by the things we are able to do. I’m glad Evan is flexible enough to handle a change in assignments!

Wednesday, January 1, 2014. HAPPY NEW YEAR, EVERYONE! May love, joy, peace, and all the other fruit of the Spirit – patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – be yours in abundance throughout the year and always. Praise the Lord!

I said I would tell you the changes I will be making as my disease progresses. Here is one of them: I am going to close this Penny now, even though it is shorter than most of the others I have written. The 3 months are up now, and the couple pages I still have in mind would do just as well in the next issue. The fruit of the Spirit must be deeply rooted on the inside of me if it is to overflow to others. I need to practice peace by reducing the amount of stress I put on myself by accepting writing deadlines, whether from myself or others. So, goodbye for now. Lord willing, I’ll see you again in Penny 34!

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Verna Kwiatkowski

www.vernakwiatkowski.com