

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 34

(JANUARY – MARCH, 2014)

Saturday, January 4, 2014. Hello, readers! You are welcome to come with me on my journey through these next 3 months, as long as you understand that things could change at any time. I'm not just thinking of death here, although when you live in a nursing home, as I do, death is never far from your thoughts. Just last week Mary Cerniglia, a 4th floor resident who lived near me, suddenly left us. I was told that, while she was sitting in her wheelchair, her head dropped forward, as if she had dozed off for a few minutes. When Blanche, her roommate and close friend, tried to wake her up for supper and she did not respond, the nursing staff sprang into action. I heard the nurses ask if she had a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order. Apparently she did, for soon thereafter she was pronounced dead. (All of us at Sky View are color-coded. If your name is typed on yellow paper on your wristband, you have a DNR; if it is on white paper, you do not. The names outside our doors are likewise color-coded. In case you are wondering, my wristband and room ID are yellow.)

Monday, January 13, 2014. This has been an eventful start to the new year! A couple days after Mary died, Blanche fell and broke her hip. She was in the hospital about 10 days recovering from surgery. Then another 4th floor resident was admitted to the hospital with high blood pressure (she's OK now with medication), and several other residents fell. The weather has been severe as well, with record-breaking cold temperatures near zero many days. We have had snowstorms that left as much as ten inches on the ledge outside my window, and there has been ice, MUCH ice, especially black ice. Both the snow and the ice were made worse by strong, gusty winds. On one day conditions were such that seven staff members fell on the path from their cars to the building! And twice some of the aides and nurses were mandated to stay overnight, because others could not get from their homes to Sky View. This always stirs up all kinds of emotions, both in the staff and in the residents. Some nurses and aides look at this as an adventure, coupled with a chance to make extra money, while others dread being mandated for various reasons, the most common being that they can't sleep well unless they are in their own beds. It takes a few days for the schedules to get back to normal, causing stress to the residents who are concerned about who will take care of them each shift.

Now add to that turmoil the disruption caused by changing all the windows in Sky View, a project begun in mid-December on the 5th floor. Only the noise of heavy-duty drills, hammers, and chisels let us know on the 4th floor that the work was underway. Then, suddenly, it was our turn, and dust, dirt, and disarray came with the noise, as well as blasts of cold air whenever the old panes were taken out so the new ones could be installed. My room was done last Thursday. Housekeeping came in and covered all my surfaces and equipment with large plastic bags, and moved some of the furniture. At that point I left my room; when I returned several hours later, the new windows were in place and the workers gone, leaving the cleaning up for the Sky View staff to handle. My aide Kayan (pronounced Kay-Ann) kindly disposed of the dusty plastic bags, although she realized that was not her job. (Housekeeping came later and found the work done.) When a Maintenance man came the next day to put my shades back up, he found the center shade was broken, that is, it would not lift up. He looked for a replacement, to no

avail, so for a couple days my center shade stayed down while the ones on either side were lifted. The shade there now is 5 inches too narrow, I was told, and will be replaced when the new order arrives. I am content with the one I have! The greatest news is that my room has been MUCH warmer since the installation – a worthwhile investment, indeed!

My sinuses did react to all the dust in the air. Now, in mid-February, they are back to normal, perhaps aided by the fact that the window project has been on hold for about 5 weeks due to our extremely cold weather. Meanwhile, birthdays and anniversaries kept coming up, reminding us of the passage of time. December 28 marked the completion of 8 years of my living at Sky View! Then on January 1, against her wishes, Charlotte turned 103, an age she thinks is much too old. And on January 6 our son George and his wife Janet celebrated 35 years of marriage!

When I started this entry, it was to say that all this activity is perfectly NORMAL for life on earth. We all have to find ways to handle stress; even Jesus had stress-reducing practices that he turned to when necessary.* It seems to me that we put extra stress on ourselves when we think God doesn't want his children to have any adversities on earth, especially in the areas of health and money. Many years ago my daughter Marty told me how she thinks about this topic, which quickly became my thinking as well.

She said when she reads Bible passages like Revelation 21:3&4, for example, which says in Heaven there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain, then she figures these things ARE to be expected on earth, as part of the human condition for now. With the WHY? question thus answered, members of God's faith family (all are invited to join!) have the advantage of all sorts of spiritual resources to help us handle – and even benefit from! – our temporary afflictions on earth, plus the added encouragement of knowing that in our permanent Home all our previous impairments will be healed, and there is NOTHING There that will harm us anymore! I'm sure some of you can tell that I'm trying to finish this entry before it becomes an essay, or a book! The best thing to do is stop NOW and hope you understand! :-)

*I was tempted here to go off on a tangent and list some of the techniques Jesus used, but that belongs in an essay, not in Penny. Why don't YOU start that list? Doing what Jesus did will relieve our stresses as well!

Wednesday, January 29, 2014. Another New Word! One day recently my aide Kayan came prancing into my room happily singing: "If you're happy and you know it, say 'Amen!'," and I responded: "Amen!" I was surprised, while Kayan was overjoyed! She had me repeat the word several times, especially when another aide came to help her. From this experience I learned that talking takes more energy than I care to expend. So I won't be making a list of new words to try out. Instead, I will add this to the list already started: No, Uh-huh, and More. They are all useful words, amen? Amen!

Saturday, February 1, 2014. Wow! It's February already and I am not NEARLY done telling you what happened in January! Even the entry from the 13th is not finished. (Today I wrote about putting the shades back up.) Here's my plan for proceeding, DV: I will write an inclusive title in this place and then make a list of topics I want to write

about. After that, when I don't have February news to record, I will work on this section. I think it will all blend in the end. Here is the title –

IT HAPPENED IN JANUARY

A NEW way of preparing services. Actually this started in December, and was continued in January, February, and now in March. Last fall I had a theme running through my mind that required me to do a lot of typing, up to 7 pages per service. With my declining flexibility and strength, and even though I used 3 typists to write Scripture passages, that was quite a task! In December, when the January project was about to begin, I asked Cliff when this was going to end, indicating that I needed help. He thought for a moment and said, "We have 7 year's worth of services on file in this room. Why don't we go back to the beginning and adapt those programs for now." He said he would do most of the typing, putting the material into the format we have been using lately, and I would edit it for current usage. What a great idea! This way I work on the project for 2 days instead of 2 weeks!

2 assignments: In Memoriam. On Monday, January 6, I joined a group of ladies who were sitting in the lobby chatting. I seldom do that, since I can't talk, but that day – there I was! Word came to us that at the 4th floor meeting with our social worker Diane on Wednesday we would be having a memorial service for Mary Cerniglia, who had died the previous week. From across the lobby, Pat said to me, "You should write a paper for Mary's service." As I was pondering this, Pat continued: "Really, you should! Mary came to your services, and the reason I come is because she invited me." By then I knew I had an assignment from God. I told Diane I would have a paper for her to read and also to hand out. And, thanks to God, I did.

On the evening of Wednesday, January 15, I heard on the news that an army helicopter had crashed in Georgia, killing the pilot and injuring the other two soldiers who were aboard. The next day I received an email from Cliff titled Sad News. He told me that the helicopter pilot was Captain Clayton Carpenter, a young man I had met in the United Methodist Church in Shrub Oak, and whose family I knew. Soon I realized that the God of All Comfort was giving me part 2 of my assignment! So I wrote a letter of comfort to the Carpenter family and to the church, which Cliff delivered in due time.

After that, I began to wonder if my condolences were meant for a wider audience. I am thinking that some of you, my readers, may be in need of comfort, or know someone who is needy. For these reasons, I am printing my letters here for your use.

* * * * *

January 8, 2014

TO THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF MARY CERNIGLIA
FROM VERNA KWIATKOWSKI, 413,

at the request of PAT TROMER, who told me a story after Mary's death that I had not known before. Pat said that Mary, who had begun attending my non-denominational monthly worship service, told her that she should go too, adding: "You will like it." And so Pat, and perhaps others, became a regular attender because of Mary's testimony.

I appreciate that! At the service on January 2, I was aware of Mary's absence, yes, but I did not think of her as dead. Scripture says that, for a person with faith, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. So I think of her as if she had moved to a new place where she is completely healthy and so immeasurably happy that I can't help entering into her joy! Even if you think as I do, there will be times when you miss having Mary on earth. God understands your sorrow, and is willing to be your comforter.

In Second Corinthians chapter 1, God is even called The God of All Comfort. Listen:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,
who comforts us in all our troubles, so that
we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort
we ourselves have received from God.*

A PRAYER:

Dear Lord, may Mary's family and friends find so much comfort from you, the God of All Comfort, that their sorrow will turn into joy and peace and hope, which will overflow and bless those around them. Amen.

* * * * *

January 25, 2014

To Clayton's family and church

LOVE REMAINS

"And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."
— 1 Corinthians 13:13

Faith remains because God makes it remain. Once a person believes in God and Jesus, God seals that person with the Holy Spirit, saying, "You are mine forever. I give you eternal life, and you will never perish. No one can pluck you out of my hands."

Hope is linked with faith in Hebrews 11:1 – "Now faith is being SURE of what we hope for and CERTAIN of what we do not see." Hope KNOWS that Heaven is a real, beautiful, incredible place that makes us say "Oh, wow!" when first we see it. Hope is sure that all the residents of Heaven are ALIVE, HAPPY, and HEALTHY, and that one day all of God's faith family will come together in a joyous reunion that will last forever! Hope remains because what it waits for is awesome!

Aren't you glad, as I am, that love remains? You can go on loving Clayton and sense his love for you just as you did when he was on the earth but physically away from you, for he still is alive! Other things will pass away, but love never fails, love never dies.

Jesus told Martha that believers never die, although he acknowledged to his disciples that her brother Lazarus was dead. My favorite illustration of this puzzle is of a man who was being chased by Death. The man ran as fast as he could, but Death was gaining on him. Then, just as Death made its final lunge, the man surged upward, saying: "Ha! You missed!" And there stood Death with only an empty shell! God knows we humans may still sorrow when a loved one leaves, although we do not grieve as those who have no hope. When sorrowing, go to the God of all Comfort, and find rest and peace in his

Everlasting Arms. Romans 15:13 is the blessing I pray for you – and for me, and for all believers: “May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen.

Movie Recommendations. In January I enjoyed several movies on DVD so much that I want to tell you about a few of them. The Dyer family came here from Massachusetts in the waning days of 2013, bearing gifts. Mine included 2 movies of the kind MaryBeth knows I like: sports stories that are true. They are 42 (the Jackie Robinson story) and Marshall, the rebuilding account of a college that lost most of its football team in an airplane crash. The Dyers and I watched 42 together, and it opened up some interesting conversation afterwards! Leo got the rest for me from the library. First, Miss Potter, a fascinating biographical portrayal of Beatrix Potter, author and illustrator of children’s books, notably those about Peter Rabbit, and 2 fantasies on the order of Mary Poppins: Nanny McPhee and its sequel. Writing this entry has brought me recollection pleasure: I wouldn’t mind seeing all of them again!

Monday, February 3, 2014. What a contrast there is in the weather between yesterday and today! Sunday was balmy, a foretaste of spring, in spite of the groundhogs’ predictions that winter would last 6 more weeks. The temperature was in the 50’s, to the delight of those involved in the Super Bowl, played Sunday evening in the New Jersey stadium that is in suburban New York City. I watched the game, not caring whether Denver or Seattle won, never expecting to see what actually unfolded as Seattle scored 2 points in the opening seconds, going on to dominate their opponent by a wider margin than ever before! I found the game interesting, BUT –

The Super Bowl was NOT the highlight of my day! My high point began around 2:00 when I heard a familiar knock on my door and in walked Leo, followed by Judith! Both of them attend the same church; it was Leo’s testimony that made Judith want to meet me. Since late in December I had been anticipating her visit, postponed by winter weather and circumstances, making the fulfillment all the more sweet. What a great time we had getting acquainted! This was indeed a God appointment. Judith left with a handful of writings and my web address, promising to read everything on it. Leo, who had come here in Judith’s car, remained to visit for a while, and then went home by bus, for he gave up driving recently.

Today the temperature dropped about 20 degrees, and it snowed all day! Two more snowstorms are predicted for this week, with Thursday (the day of our service) looking like it will be cold but sunny. We’ll see!

PS: The storm predicted for the weekend was canceled several days ahead of time.

Saturday, February 8, 2014. We did have a substantial storm that started on Tuesday and went into Wednesday, ending up with a coating of ice. People were warned to stay off the roads on Wednesday, yet the roads were clear on Thursday, and all our team members with assignments were there to present the service. Whether or not God had anything directly to do with the favorable road conditions (for instead of asking for what I wanted, I had practiced not worrying, trusting that God knew all about it), I certainly did

THANK God for his act of lovingkindness toward us. That was especially meaningful and intimate because the Lovingkindness Medley was a big part of our service on Thursday!

WARNING! *If you do not want to read anything with the word “toilet” in it, then skip the rest of this entry and resume reading with the next.*

But clear roads wasn't the only blessing I received from God that day; far from it! Something happened Thursday evening that had me shedding tears of joy! It had to do with the kinds of lifts used at Sky View, specifically on the 4th floor, where there are 2: the Saralift and the Hoyer. Both are large pieces of equipment used to transfer residents from one place to another, such as into and out of bed, and into and out of various kinds of wheelchairs or shower chairs, which are used for toileting as well as for actual showers.

When I first came to Sky View my ability to rise to a standing position was evaluated, with the results indicating that I needed the Saralift. This wonderful invention relied on my upper body strength to hold on while also providing the lift I no longer had in my legs. Three years later I was evaluated again by a member of our Physical Therapy Department who allowed me to remain on the Saralift, much to my relief. For 3 years I had been observing and thinking about the Hoyer lift, which I knew was in my future if I lived long enough, and I couldn't get beyond the thought that using a Hoyer meant no more using the toilet. I even checked with the staff who said my observation was true. I wanted to delay that as long as possible!

And my desire was granted, for it was more than 5 years before I was evaluated again. On January 15 I met in my room with Helen, my caseworker from the ALS Society, Diane, my social worker, and Michelle, my nurse manager. Our conversation centered on my declining physical condition and how to prepare for it. I expressed my concerns openly to them and they responded with sensitivity and compassion; what a team! Later in the month a long series of in-service programs was announced which every nurse and aide was required to attend. Day after day over the loudspeaker we were reminded that something big was going on. Eventually we residents found out that Sky View is getting new lifts, and every nurse and aide was being trained how to use them by company representatives.

Late in the afternoon on Thursday, February 6, two of the reps came into my room along with my aide and Michelle, to evaluate me for use of the machine that is going to replace the Saralift. It only took a few seconds on the lift for them to see that I did not have the strength in my back that was required to use it. So – quite suddenly, I was assigned to the Hoyer! My eyes filled with tears as I tried to absorb the change, when a statement by Michelle made my eyes overflow with tears of joy! She said: “You can still use the toilet.” Apparently Sky View had obtained equipment designed for this very basic need! To me, this was a God moment; I felt so loved and understood by God, my #1 Aide!

PS: I am writing this Post Script on Sunday, February 16. For 10 days my aides and I have been working with the Hoyer lift, trying to get a routine established. The Hoyer is much more time consuming, though I think that will improve with practice, and it is certainly safer! I don't know how long this phase will last. I know I'm heading toward being a total care patient – unless God takes me home before then. My life is in God's hands!

Wednesday, April 2, 2014. Time to wrap up Penny 34 and start the next! Here are some highlights from the past few weeks. In February the oldest resident on the 4th floor died. No, not Charlotte! This was Jean, who was 106! For the past year or so, Jean would be dressed, put in a recliner-type wheelchair, and placed in the hallway or Day Room, where we related to her as best we could. Two outstanding features drew our attention: (1) she always wore a hat, different every day, many of which she had designed and made herself, and (2) she was always cuddling a stuffed animal, at least one of which was from her childhood. Jean's presence was peaceful; she didn't seem to be in pain. She was loved by her family and her Sky View aides, including one who called Jean her granny. I see lots of value in the last years of Jean's life. Do you?

In March our son Paul, who lives in California, came to spend a week visiting family and friends in the Northeast. How refreshing it was to see him again! When Paul was in my room I showed him a poem that I was composing. He liked it very much and asked when it would be finished. When Paul left 5 days later, he carried with him the first copies of [The Place Where I Am Heading](#). Soon Marty had put it on my website, where it is available for you to read, if you wish.

Finally, I'm leaving you with **A MYSTERY!** About 2 weeks ago I was sound asleep and deep in dreamland when 2 night aides came in through the open door and said, "Do you know you were talking in your sleep? We could hear you out in the hall!" I must have made some sort of acknowledging response, and then they left. Later on, when I was fully awake, many questions for the aides were running around in my head. "Did you say I was TALKING? Was I actually using WORDS? Do you recall any of them?" I don't expect any answers, for I don't remember who came into my room, nor exactly when this incident occurred. I choose to take this as the firstfruits of what is to come. When we fall at the feet of Jesus in Glory, exclaiming "My Lord and my God!," I expect my voice to be just as loud and distinctive as anybody else's!

Goodbye for now. Love, Verna

© April, 2014

Verna Kwiatkowski

www.vernakwiatkowski.com