

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 35

(APRIL – JUNE, 2014)

Friday, April 25, 2014. Hello, everyone! Welcome to Penny 35. Most of April is already gone, so I will be writing retrospectively once again, but that's all right, as it will force me to be more concise. I am going to begin by describing a day that was filled with activity. The first part deserves a headline: OLDEST RESIDENT ON 4TH FLOOR DIES. I used that headline recently, followed by a disclaimer: No, not Charlotte! That was when Jean died at 106. This time it WAS Charlotte, gone at 103. Let's start at the very beginning, as Maria advises in *The Sound of Music*.

Thursday, April 3, 2014. The activity of that busy day began in the wee hours of the morning when my night aide came to me and told me my good friend Charlotte had just died. As I processed the news, which was NOT surprising, the aide told me she was with her when she took her last breath, and it was peaceful. Joy filled my soul as I thought of Charlotte's wish being granted! Soon afterwards I was back in dreamland.

When I awoke for the day, I had plenty to think about! To begin with, it was the first Thursday of the month! In just a few hours Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends would begin, and that always has me excited. Then, too, at that very moment my brother and his wife, Bob and Esther Ziegler, were on their way from their home in Maryland to Sky View, not only to ATTEND our service, but also to TAKE PART in it! Of course I was also thinking of Charlotte, and the amazing fact that was becoming clear: in March she had attended the last of our services that she COULD have attended, a story I knew I would have to write, for only God could have known that detail!

Then came the service. My sister-in-law, recently retired, had served for many years as pastor of various congregations, and as chaplain of nursing homes, but we had never taken part in the same service until the afternoon of April 3. Specifically, I had written a new call to worship, which Esther read responsively with Bob. I couldn't help feeling that some unfinished business had been handled by this action. To me, it was satisfying!

After the service, Bob, Esther, George and I returned to my room where we happily engaged in conversation for more than an hour. Just as my guests were about to leave, Carolyn Burke, my friend and traveling companion, arrived! I hadn't seen her for about six months; she was SO welcome! Introductions were made all around, and she and George warmly embraced, indicating the depth of affection formed years ago when they were involved in a Christian ministry project together. When the others were gone, Carolyn told me her news: before November she plans to move to Georgia to be near her daughter and her family! That means many of us must CHANGE! I'm sure you can all agree that April 3rd was a busy – and emotional! – day for me!

And now, because I have written about Charlotte in several past issues of Penny, and because I think it honors God, who obviously knew when Charlotte would be leaving this earthly realm, I am reprinting here the story I wrote for Sky View's Horizons in the week after she died. It is titled:

CHARLOTTE GETS HER WISH

Written in fond memory of Charlotte Wehrenberg by

Verna Kwiatkowski

As I recall, Charlotte was moved from the 5th floor at Sky View, where she had lived for many years, to the 4th floor just about the same time I arrived here at the end of 2005. She was quite a storyteller! I learned a lot about her life and how she thought by listening as she spoke in Diane's 4th floor meetings, and from personal conversations, for in the early years she could both read and hear my Lightwriter, the device that enables me to "speak."

Faith was a topic we both enjoyed discussing. Charlotte was well aware that she was in the hands of a loving God who would some day take her Home to Heaven. She just hoped it would be soon. She had no desire to be 100, much less 103!

Shortly after Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends started meeting on the first Thursday of the month in the first floor living room, Charlotte became a regular member of our audience. I still remember her reaction at the end of her first service; she wheeled herself over to me and profusely thanked me, saying with utmost sincerity, "You have awakened in me something I didn't know I was missing!"

After a few years, Charlotte suddenly stopped coming to the services. When I came back upstairs after the first absence, I overheard her in the Day Room saying to a resident, "Here she comes now to ask me why I wasn't there." Of course I did no such thing! She didn't owe me an explanation.

When a few absences had gone by, I wrote her a note asking if I had offended her in some way. She assured me that there was no offense between us, and then told me why she was no longer coming. I don't remember the details, but I could imagine how she felt. So that's the way things remained – until about a year ago.

At that time Charlotte began attending our services again, and, like the first time, she expressed her appreciation of every one. In the fall of 2013 Charlotte became confused and anxious. One month I watched her get on the elevator to go down, but when I got there myself, she was gone. Afterwards, she explained that she came back up because she could not go down unless someone stayed with her. This was not true at the time, but it was Charlotte's reality.

From then on, every first Thursday Charlotte would tell me she wants to come, but she can't, and she knew I understood. When I returned to the 4th floor, a smiling Charlotte would eagerly greet me, saying, "I hear the service was wonderful!" Each time I smiled and nodded, entering into her happiness.

Then came March 6, the first Thursday in March, 2014. As I went to the elevator to go downstairs, I was met by members of the activities staff who said, "You shouldn't be going down. The service will be on the 4th floor today." I assumed that meant the windows were being replaced in the living room area since I couldn't imagine what else would cause the change.

I was wrong. Apparently it was an attempt to keep an illness from spreading. It must have worked, for I never heard anything about it. My team and staff members from Sky View quickly turned the 4th floor Day Room into a suitable place for the service, quite a feat, since the space was a lot smaller! Noticeably missing was a piano or keyboard for Earl to play. Instead, we sang accompanied by George on his cello. It all worked out well!

I decided to stay just outside the open door so more people could get in. Then, just as the service was about to begin, CHARLOTTE entered the room and parked her chair in the back, as if she had a reserved space! She stayed until the service was almost over before her anxieties made her leave. During the next couple days she told me on 3 occasions how very much she had enjoyed being at the service, and I came to see that God had graciously granted Charlotte her wish to be there!

This thought was confirmed early on Thursday, April 3 – yes, the day of the April service – when my night aide came to me and said, “You have lost a friend. Charlotte just breathed her last breath. I saw it, and it was peaceful.” We both knew what had happened – God had come to take her Home, fulfilling another of her longtime wishes! On New Year’s Day, 2014 she was 103; and on April 3rd God said, “Come with me!”

One other related story comes to mind as I write this. Several years ago Charlotte was moved from her large private room to a smaller one across the hall. I wondered what she thought of the move. Her beautiful smile and her gracious words revealed her peaceful state of mind. She said: “This room is better for me. It’s all I need. Besides, this is the last move I will make until the Lord takes me Home!” It turns out she was speaking prophetically here, for she never moved again! I choose to think this was God granting another one of Charlotte’s wishes!

Like many others who lived at Sky View, Charlotte is gone but not forgotten!

Wednesday, May 14, 2014. Within the past month I made another major decision to adapt to my declining physical abilities: I resigned from being editor of Sky View’s Horizons, the magazine we print several times a year. I enjoyed learning what an editor does (it’s far more than proofreading!) and doing the job as best I could. One of my favorite tasks was to notice any themes that might come up among the submissions, as I wanted to group them together. In this last issue, published last week, the subject of creativity caught my eye, sparked by reporting on an art show held here in January. I discussed my vision with Elinor Schuman, our volunteer reporter, and told her what other articles I wanted to complete the section. Then I thought of an unfinished poem on the subject of creativity that I had started more than a year ago. I was puzzled back then when the poem took on a different shape, and basically had put the project on hold. When I looked this time, I saw that they were actually 3 poems on the same topic! Soon they were finished, much to my delight! Here they are, as they appeared in Horizons:

CREATIVITY – 3 POEMS

By Verna Kwiatkowski. Sky View.

1.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
He made human beings in his image, giving us high worth.

We reflect God's image partly by our ability to create –
Not from nothing, as God did, but with supplies he made.

We choose from these supplies, and, led by inspiration,
We make all sorts of things from our fertile imagination.

2.

The heavens and the earth have a rhythm, a pulse, a beat;

a pattern, a size, a shape;
a palate, a color, a hue;
a melody, a voice, a tone;
a fragrance, an aroma, a scent;
a texture, a contrast, a feel;
a movement, a turning, a spin.

From the Master Designer, we learn, appreciate, repeat.

3.

We are all variations on a theme produced by God.
We should recognize this, and give each other a nod!
Our common ancestry makes us cousins in the end:
How we should harmonize! How we should blend!

As students enrolled in God's School of Creative Arts,
Let's use what God supplied, all the bits, all the parts,
To construct lives that are functional, and beautiful. Then:
Build each other up with joy, giving God the glory! Amen!

Monday, May 26, 2014. Memorial Day. In my "mulching time" this morning, my mind connected 3 things: Memorial Day, Penny 35, and a story I wrote several years ago for Sky View's Horizons, called PEONIES FOR DECORATION DAY. I was so excited as I thought about these things! I know that God was behind this connection; it was no accident! God knows my schedule and my energy level, and taking both into account, gave me the idea to put this article in Penny 35, enlarging it with fresh material, just as I now with Cliff's assistance am adapting earlier materials for the monthly services. And so, with a grateful heart, on Friday, May 30, (a most appropriate date, as you will see),

and with June's service finished, I now begin the project of turning the former article into a story for you. The same title is still sufficient:

Peonies for Decoration Day

In Annville, Pennsylvania, where I lived during most of my childhood years (born in 1933), Memorial Day was commonly called Decoration Day, an apt name, for that was the day we decorated the graves in all the cemeteries in town. How festive the burial grounds looked on that day! In addition to the beautiful bouquets of flowers that sprang up all over the place, the graves of all veterans were adorned with flags. The date was always May 30, so the celebration could fall on any day of the week. It was not a school holiday, however, because our schools always closed for the summer before that.

I cannot think of Memorial Day without remembering my mother and her peony bushes, which grew at the side of our house on S. Lancaster Street. She depended on these perennials to supply her with flowers for the cemetery year after year, and the plants did their best to oblige. However, weather conditions played a role in determining exactly when the buds would open into their large, beautiful blossoms of pink, deep rose, and white tinged with red. Early in May Mom would begin checking the buds. She also phoned her Uncle Levi in Palmyra, the next town, to see how HIS peonies were doing. On the morning of May 30, Mom and her uncle combined their flowers at our house, generally pleased with the results. Then we went together to Grand View, the beautiful new cemetery in Annville where some of our relatives were buried, there to perform the annual duty of decorating the graves.

In 1946, the first year of the "Baby Boomers," May 30 took on new meaning for us, for that was the day that Robert Earl Ziegler, my little brother, was born! At the time I was 13 (baby-sitting age!), and my brother Harold was 10 and a half. As you can imagine, for at least the next few years, the focus of our family was on Bobby, the baby who captured our hearts!

The town of Annville always had a parade on Memorial Day, and I was usually among the spectators. I loved parades, especially the strong, steady beat of the drums, announcing in advance that much pleasure was coming! We walked two short blocks from our house to the intersection of S. Lancaster and Queen Streets to view the parade, close enough for Bobby to walk on his second birthday, with Dad and I holding his hands. As we walked along, I told Bobby that the parade was for HIM, saying, "The people of Annville are so happy it's your birthday that they decided to have a parade just for you!" Bobby beamed with delight! I don't know what Dad thought, but he did not contradict me.

For the next 2 or 3 years I repeated the myth about the parade's connection with Bobby's birthday. A few years later I saw the story for what it was: a deception; a LIE! – and began to regret what I had done. I also regretted a letter I wrote to Bobby during those same years, signing my name as Santa Claus. I learned many things, pro and con, from my helping to raise my young brother and from my baby-sitting career that carried over onto the way we raised our children, and this was definitely one of them!

Four of our five children were born during the Baby Boomer years, which ended in 1964. All five were raised knowing the truth about the origin of their Christmas gifts, Easter baskets, and the money that was exchanged under their pillows for the baby teeth we

found there. Eventually we told them the stories, along with other fairy tales and fantasies found in children's literature. I have never regretted our decisions about these matters. As for my former regrets, they are long gone, turned into something good by my faithful God.

When my brother Bob graduated from high school in 1964, he moved with my parents to a new house Dad had built for them in Palmyra. Mom wanted her peonies to go with her, so Dad dug a flowerbed at the side of the new house and transplanted some of the bushes, where they continued to bloom for Decoration Day.

I don't know how this story ended, but it did! Uncle Levi moved to Florida, and my family and I settled in New York. One thing has remained the same: Bob's birthday is still May 30, a date we OCCASIONALLY share with Memorial Day! :-)

Wednesday, June 11, 2014. I Stand Corrected! I found out at the 4th floor meeting today that I was wrong in thinking Charlotte was the oldest resident on our floor when she died at 103. She was just the oldest I knew about! Diane, our social worker and the moderator of our meetings, announced that Sal had just died at the age of 104! I had no idea he was over 100! OOPS!

Friday, June 13, 2014. I Make Corrections! George and I are working on a project that will gather my poems together on my website, making them more accessible to readers. In doing so, I discovered that the collection of 7 Haiku poems I called A Gift of Love would read so much better if I rearranged verses 2, 3, and 4. I am so pleased with the results that I am printing the revision here.

A GIFT OF LOVE

By Verna Kwiatkowski. Sky View. In the Japanese Haiku style: 3 line verses, with a 5 - 7 - 5 syllable pattern.

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

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

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!

Saturday, June 21, 2014. Last Sunday, June 15, Leo and I celebrated our 57th wedding anniversary. We were married in 1957, so we enjoyed the 57–57 connection (like Heinz, Leo noted). He also calculated that we have been married – as of the 15th – for 20,818 days! We lived those days one at a time, which sounds silly as I write the words; what other choice do we have? Can we live 2 days at a time, or 5? The important thing is that God has been involved in every day of our marriage, right up to now. I don't mean to imply that all was well all the time, for there were some very stressful issues along the way that took a long time to resolve. There were many, many good times, too, and the latter have swallowed up the former in my mind, praise God! NOTHING is too hard for God to handle! Wait and see!

Saturday, June 28, 2014. Last Friday, June 20, while Cliff and I were preparing the service for July, he came across a place where I had mentioned the enjoyment of God. Cliff, who had been thinking about this subject, then asked me a personal question: How do YOU enjoy God? I said I liked to catch God at work in my life, a frequent occurrence. Usually I end up smiling at God, and I feel God smiling back at me. It's an intimate childlike moment of mutual enjoyment and love, made all the more amazing by the fact that God is FAR greater than I! Respect for God is an element of enjoyment!

As an example, I told Cliff about an incident that happened the day before, while I was working on the service. (Let me remind you that outwardly I can no longer sing one note, yet inwardly my musical abilities remain as active as ever!) I wanted to write a new verse for He's Got the Whole World in His Hands, something that would do justice to the magnificent images of God found in Isaiah 40. Before I got out of bed, I thought I had the words, but by the time I was in my chair, I had forgotten them! I went to the computer anyway and soon a different set of words came into my mind, better than the first! I had no doubt about where they came from; my God knows me SO WELL! As I typed the words, I was singing them inwardly, smiling my thanks to God, when all of a sudden something happened that was unusual for me. As the song ended, it modulated into a familiar worship song, which I also sang in my head. A few minutes of delightful, personal worship poured out from my heart to God's, pleasing us both, before the incident ended. Joy is multiplied when shared with someone who understands!

Unlike the incident, the ENJOYMENT did NOT end. In fact, it kicked into high gear the next day, Saturday, June 21. That afternoon I looked out my window and saw that the sky had become quite overcast, and a strong, gusty wind was rippling through the trees that cover the rolling hills I see from my room. Just then 2 large, black birds flew near our building and headed toward the hills. Since they were the kind that have entertained me before, I decided to watch them as long as I could. By different routes, both birds went to

same tree, landing one at a time, perhaps 10 feet apart, on the top branches of one of the tallest trees in my line of vision. I saw them swaying in the breeze and imagined that they were having a wonderful time! Furthermore, I began to wonder if the whole trip had been pre-planned, with one bird saying to the other, (in bird language, of course), "The Swinging Tree is running today! Let's take a ride on it." And they did!

My enjoyment of the scene was greatly enhanced by the presence of God, who smiled as we both watched the birds perform. God knew that I could almost hear them singing "I'm swinging in the wind, just swinging in the wind ..." to the tune of Singing in the Rain! It was enough to make me laugh aloud! In the increasing darkness, the leaves of the distant tree appeared to be as black as the birds, and I wondered if they were still there. Every time the question arose, one of them would flap its wings, and I knew! This was God's doing, too; we were having fun together, and it was FAR from over!

All of a sudden a gust of wind, MUCH stronger than before, hit the trees, obviously taking the birds by surprise. Instantly they flattened, appearing to me like 2-dimensional cartoon characters with wings and tails askew, hanging on for DEAR LIFE to the tree that was now trying to shake them off. I could actually see sky between the legs of one of the birds, an amazing sight that I would like to retain forever! How well God designed the birds' claws! I pictured the look on their faces as similar to those on roller coaster riders: a mixture of terror and exhilaration, with terror predominating. Soon after the gusty wind died down, the birds flew away together, taking with them a story to pass down through the generations and leaving behind a very happy spectator!

I remained at the window, continuing to watch the trees sway in the wind. As my eyes moved down the ridge, I noticed another curious sight: a tree with branches and leaves that looked like a man's head in profile! I was looking at the left side of his head, which included curly hair, an eyebrow, an eye and nose, a mustache, an open mouth, and a neatly trimmed beard. The wind was rippling through the man's hair, but had not yet reached his mouth. When it did, the man had a lot to say! Perhaps he was also singing "I'm talking in the wind, just talking in the wind ...," happy to have the chance to speak with his Creator, who, of course, was there! What? You didn't know trees could talk? :-)

Now you, as well as Cliff, know SOME of the ways I enjoy God. I'm going to conclude Penny 35 with 3 questions for YOU to think about:

1. Do YOU enjoy God?
2. If yes, HOW do you enjoy God?
3. If not, WHY not?

Love, Verna

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Verna Kwiatkowski

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