

## A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 37

(OCTOBER – DECEMBER, 2014)

**Sunday, October 19, 2014.** Greetings to all who are reading this. I hope you are enjoying your day with God, as I am. There is a special reason why my cup of joy is overflowing today: I just finished a new poem, and that accomplishment is always a happy one. I'm sure that's because God is so involved in my poetry project, and has been from the beginning. In my memories I recall writing my first poem, inspired by an article in Our Boys and Girls, a take-home paper given to children who attended the Church of the Brethren Sunday School in my childhood. It was 1942, the year we lived on the farm. The paper that summer Sunday included a picture of a chickadee, and the poem I wrote at age nine was:

A chickadee is singing  
Up in the tree.  
Such a cheerful song –  
"Chick-a-dee-dee-dee!"

As simple as it is, that poem laid the foundation for most of my subsequent verses: it has both rhythm and rhyme. Two months ago – approximately 72 years later – I wrote this note on my computer: "Started August 19, 2014 with refrain coming to me while I was still in bed." And here is the refrain:

ANY time is TIME WELL SPENT  
Surveying our inner environment!

"Ha!" said George when reading the note. "I can't wait to see how this one unfolds!" My son waited patiently for 2 months while the poem was "under construction." Meanwhile I continued to marvel at the circumstances that stirred up the subject in the first place, for it was in my mind before August 19, even before May 13! As I recall, early this year Cliff brought a devotional book with him on his weekly visits, so he could read certain chapters to me. I too was impressed with the author's words. One phrase so caught my attention that I asked Cliff to write it on a Post-it from the 3x3 packet of note papers he found on my desk. The words he wrote were: Inner Environment. Then, without removing the note from the packet, he returned it to a place the desk where I could see it. For a few days I enjoyed musing on the Bible passages that talk about our inner thoughts being revealed by what we say. Then, inevitably, the note was covered over by a pile of papers leading to the usual result: Out of sight, out of mind.

But it was GOD who had put that phrase into my mind, not only for my entertainment, but for his good purpose. And so, on Tuesday, May 13, God uncovered the note in a unique way. On her regular weekly visit that day, Barbara was telling me that for the next two months her attendance would be so sporadic that she had better write it down for me. She got her calendar and a pen from her purse, then searched my desk for something on which to write, eventually finding the packet of Post-its. "It says 'Inner Environment,'" she said, jogging my memory. "That would be fine," I said, assuming Barbara would do as I would have done: remove the used paper, later putting it in an accessible spot, and using a fresh paper for my new information.

When she finished listing the Tuesdays and the Thursday services into two columns marked "Not coming" and "Coming," Barbara posted the note in the place I pointed out to her on the rim of my computer screen, where I would be reminded of her schedule many times a day. When I first saw the note, I was stunned to notice that it began with the words Inner Environment! Immediately underneath the phrase were the column headings! In time I came to appreciate that note more and more as an example of how God used Barbara and her habits to focus my attention back on our inner environment, a setup for giving me the refrain on August 19, and the subsequent writing of the poem. And yes, I was reminded again that there are more ways than one to do something right! :-)

Now here is the poem.

### OUR INNER ENVIRONMENT

*By Verna Kwiatkowski, with fond memories of my father,  
William Ziegler, who was always happy when showing,  
working on, or eating and sharing from his literal, bountiful  
garden. Also for Andrea, whose hand-painted  
"fruit of the Spirit" planter graces my room.*

Our inner life is like a garden  
Where all sorts of qualities grow.  
See! There's mercy, grace, and hope,  
And the fruit of the Spirit, row upon row.

You recognize the plants, I'm sure,  
For they bloom in your garden, too:  
Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,  
Goodness – each with a heavenly hue.

Faithfulness and gentleness are here  
And there is the lovely self-control.  
Pleasing and useful though each may be,  
Don't they make a beautiful whole?

ANY time is TIME WELL SPENT  
Surveying our inner environment!

Adam and Eve tended their garden  
Before there were thorns or weeds.  
What a pleasure it must have been  
To cultivate, and perhaps plant seeds!

Now weeds abound, without and within.  
They must go, if our gardens are to flourish.  
Our inner lives can be weedy or fruitful;  
It all depends on which plants we nourish!

Pull out sexual immorality, impurity, lust,  
Evil desires, and greed. Also anger, rage,  
Malice, slander, and filthy language –  
In NONE of these should we engage.

ANY time is TIME WELL SPENT  
Cleansing our inner environment!

With the weeds all gone, at least for now,  
Let's pause in our gardening endeavor  
To thank the Lord, who gardens with us,  
Saying, "Keep on! You are mine forever!"

We nourish godly qualities by our thoughts.  
Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely,  
These are the things we should think about –  
All that's admirable, excellent or praiseworthy.

When our sights are set on things above  
And God is nourishing our inner graces,  
Something interesting begins to happen –  
The inside beauty starts to show on our faces!

ANY time is TIME WELL SPENT  
Nurturing our inner environment!

Then we are ready for our lifelong occupation:  
Benefitting others with an overflow of godliness.  
Imagine the scene if we were ALL to overflow:  
What hope! What peace! What a burst of holiness!

The great salvation that God is working in us  
Would show up on the outside as good deeds.  
We'd encourage one another daily, and with  
Lovingkindness, take care of each other's needs.

May our words and anything we meditate upon  
Please you, Lord, our Rock and our Pardoner.  
We find much joy in sharing your love, but give  
All the glory to YOU, our Chief Inner Gardener!

Amen.

ANY time is TIME WELL SPENT  
Sharing from our beautiful, weed-free,  
Well-nourished INNER ENVIRONMENT!

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Verna Kwiatkowski

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**Thursday, December 11, 2014.** I wrote the copyright statement above to show that I considered the poem to be complete. My son, however, had other ideas. All during the weeks of the poem's construction, George felt he knew where it would end, and even proposed a final refrain! When I showed him my conclusion, I asked him to write a few lines that would both explain his thoughts and lead to his refrain. What a delightful

surprise I received the next day via email – George wrote his response in 2 verses of poetry! “It just came to me,” he said, but we both knew who to thank! Only one element was needed, an explanation as to why this poem has a P.S. When he read what I had written, George chuckled and said, “I see you still have some Ogden Nash in you!” I smiled, for I had noticed the same thing! (We were thinking of my poem from earlier in the fall, “My Wayward Feet.”) What’s more, I saw C.S. Lewis and his Shadowlands in George’s verses. What fun! Enjoy with us!

P.S. to OUR INNER ENVIRONMENT

*By Verna & George Kwiatkowski. Additional thoughts  
by George, to which I give my blessing!*

My son George was not satisfied  
With how my poem had ended.  
“It is not finished yet,” he mused,  
And then this ending he appended:

Our gardens here are shadows  
of the heavenly garden above,  
where thorns and toil are banished  
and we rest in our Father’s love.

So enjoy the earthly gardens –  
what you taste and what you see;  
but long for the heavenly garden  
where the best is yet to be!

ANY time is TIME WELL SPENT  
Anticipating our heavenly environment!

**Wednesday, December 31, 2014.** Yes, it’s New Year’s Eve as I write this. I hope to finish Penny 37 in about a week. There are several items I still want to mention, including the following –

**– 3 Movie Recommendations.**

1. Of Gods and Men (2010)
2. Heaven Is for Real (2014)
3. God’s Not Dead! (2014)

I saw all of these movies in a relatively short time in 2014, and enjoyed all three. The first two are based on true stories, and I know the third one could be true, for I had a biology teacher in my sophomore year in college who behaved in a manner similar to that of the professor in the movie, causing a crisis in my faith that God ABUNDANTLY made to work together for my good! All of them have a strong spiritual message, as indicated by their titles. I think of them as a set, one that I will watch and ponder often, since I now have the DVDs of each of them. Thanks to all who told me about the films, including my husband Leo, who said I must see #1. He was right!

### **– The Progression of my PLS.**

Primary Lateral Sclerosis is a neurological disease that is progressive, as are other better-known related diseases, like ALS, MS, and Parkinson's. One obvious difference is the length of life patients have after being diagnosed with these incurable diseases.

"People can live with PLS for DECADES," the doctor said when I was diagnosed more than a decade ago. In 2014 I made two big changes in my schedule due to my declining physical abilities: **1.** I resigned my position as editor of a magazine called Sky View's Horizons, and **2.** I stopped sending birthday and anniversary emails to our family and friends. Both of these happened around the beginning of May. The latter was a particularly hard change for me to make, as I enjoyed this intimate touch with those I love, but both lowered my stress level, thus fulfilling their purpose.

As I made these changes, I also wondered how long I would be able to continue the Penny essays, and I now realize change already is well underway! I remember thinking Penny 36 was "different," and CERTAINLY this one falls into the same category, for it has only three dated entries for the last three months, plus some current writings at the end. Perhaps I already have transitioned into a new Penny format, writing when the time is right, without the pressure of maintaining a diary. Time will tell! Wouldn't that be just like God, to gently introduce changes I thought I someday would have to make? The problem is: while I continue to have many thoughts I would love to share, I am finding it increasingly difficult to write, particularly on my Mailbug, but also on my computer. This is no surprise to me, of course; it's just something new for me to experience. Please pray for me as I continue to adjust to the advancement of my disease, desiring in all things to give glory to God, who continues to hold my hand. Thank you!

I will conclude with the papers I used as holiday greetings at Thanksgiving and Christmas 2014, in case you missed them. Today is January 7, 2015. Happy New Year! May God bless you with peace, hope, and joy in the coming year. Love, Verna

A TESTIMONY FROM VERNA  
FOR THE THANKSGIVING SERVICE AT SKY VIEW  
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2014

*Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*  
– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Be joyful, pray, and give thanks: three things God wants his children to do “all the time,” for isn’t that the meaning of “always,” “continually,” and “in all circumstances?” Here are the verses again: *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* Years ago I concluded that praying continually is more than constantly exchanging words with God. Rather, it involves being continually aware of the presence of God within and around you, so that either you or God can continue an ongoing conversation at any time. You might think of this as “multitasking,” with your mind focused on your activity but at the same time focused on God. It works for me!

Being joyful and giving thanks are interconnected, aren’t they? If we can give thanks IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, it seems to me that rejoicing would be easy, and vice versa. In our daily lives we get plenty of chances to practice these commands. For example, in October I spent four days in Phelps Memorial Hospital with mild pneumonia in one lung. I didn’t feel very sick and didn’t think I needed to go to the hospital, making this a good opportunity to practice what I preach. So I began to give thanks even before I left my room and while in the ambulance.

Over the next few days I composed a thanksgiving poem in my mind centered around my situation. Both my roommate and I were hooked up to machines that made their presence known at times by a series of shrill beeps, so it’s not surprising that the poem contained this stanza:

When our machines beep loudly in the night, waking us up,  
I will give thanks to YOU, Lord. You MORE than fill my cup!

That is the only part of the poem that survived the trip back home to Sky ViewView, and I’m even thankful for that: for what I remembered and for what I forgot! In conclusion, let’s read the verses once more, and put them into practice. Why? Because this is God’s will for us in Christ Jesus! *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* Amen.

## WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED?

By Verna Kwiatkowski

An excerpt from her essay *My Lord and My God*, adapted for the Christmas service at Sky View on December 21, 2014.

To my dear Family and Friends: Greetings!

Who would have guessed that God's creative powers would one day be used to design a body in which he could live among us on the earth? That's what happened in the Incarnation! Hebrews 10:5-7 says, *"When Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, BUT A BODY YOU PREPARED FOR ME; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.' Then I said, 'Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.'"*

Who would have guessed the body God prepared would be that of a tiny, helpless baby who couldn't even walk and talk, rather than the body of a fully grown man ready to take charge? God, who often asks us to wait, himself waited, first for "the time to fully come" before sending his son (Galatians 4:4,5), and then about 30 more years for Jesus to start his earthly ministry. Isn't that amazing?

And who would have guessed that doing God's will would include such a brutal death as the one Jesus died for us on the cross? How mysterious – how AWESOME – are God's ways! Servants are not greater than their master. Meditating on subjects such as this puts our own sufferings into perspective, doesn't it? They are all temporary! Lord, please help us not to complain!

The body that God prepared for Jesus obviously blended in with the other babies born in the area. Otherwise the angel might have mentioned physical differences to the shepherds, such as: "Look for a baby with an unusual skin color and a glow around its head." Instead, the angel told them to notice the strips of cloth with which he was wrapped and the unusual bed – a manger – in which he was lying. That REALLY was different!

Even as an adult Jesus blended in with the general population of the middle east; his skin must have been as dark as Mary's. Isaiah 53:2 says prophetically of him, *"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."* Now, as then, we are meant to be drawn to Jesus by his character and actions, not by how he looks. Yet I have often thought how wise it was to have Jesus born into a part of the world where people of all races can identify with him. God certainly does all things well! May you go through each day with a constant awareness of God. Amen!

Love, Verna

## CHRISTMAS SONGS

Here are two songs I wrote in the mid-1960s when I needed music for my junior accordion band to play in a Christmas concert. When I think of "Christmas Bells," I hear the song accompanied by the shaking of bells throughout, with gongs and cymbals at the end. It's so beautiful – in my head! At the time of the concert, "What Did Shepherds See" had only three verses, each expressing a fact from the Bible story of Christmas. When I later thought of verse four I was thrilled, for then the song included all of us!

Verna Mae Kwiatkowski Christmas Bells Verna Mae Kwiatkowski

Christ-mas bells are ring-ing, ring-ing, Christ-mas bells are ring-ing, ring-ing, 1. Christ-mas bells are gai-ly  
2. Ring out, bells, O keep on  
ring-ing, Ev-'ry-where we hear them play... Lis-ten to their hap-py sing-ing... "Christ was born on  
Ring-ing, Clear and plain we hear you call... Such a joy-ous mess-age bring-ing-"Christ has come to  
Christ-mas Day!" Save us all! Christ-mas bells are ring-ing, ring-ing, Ding! Dong! Ding!

Verna Mae Kwiatkowski What Did Shepherds See Verna Mae Kwiatkowski

1. What did shep-herds see in the sky?  
2. What did an-gels sing in the sky?  
in the sky?  
in the sky?  
Saw an an-gel bright  
Hap-pi-ness we bring—  
Robed in heav-en-ly  
Christ is born! The  
light!  
King! That's what shep-herds saw in the sky.  
That's what an-gels sang in the sky.  
3. What did wise men see in the sky? (Repeat)  
Saw a star so bright...  
Led them to the Light...  
That's what wise men saw in the sky.  
4. Who will come for me in the sky? (Repeat)  
Jesus Christ, the Same!  
Glor-y to his name!  
He will come for me in the sky.