

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 40
(SEPTEMBER, 2015 – FEBRUARY, 2016)

Wednesday, September 30, 2015. Greetings to all who are reading this newsletter, from Verna, serving God gratefully for taking me into his eternal family through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. In case we are meeting for the first time via this essay, here is a brief summary of my situation. For nearly 10 years I have been living happily in the nursing home at Sky View, in Croton-on-Hudson, NY, because I have a rare neurological disease called Primary Lateral Sclerosis (PLS). Among other things, PLS gradually removed my ability to walk and talk, and the use of my arms is increasingly limited. The words of Habakkuk are ringing in my head now as though they were mine: “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be joyful in God my Savior!” And that is my story, briefly told.

Leftovers. When Jesus fed the multitudes on the mountainside by multiplying the bread and fish that had been brought there, he asked his disciples to gather up the leftovers, and they did. When he fed the 5,000 men, besides women and children, 12 baskets full of leftovers remained, and when the dinner guests numbered 4,000 men, 7 baskets were collected at the end. Why did Jesus want the food to be systematically collected and counted? I’m sure we could come up with quite a long list of reasons, all valid, but I would like to focus on just one – the food could be eaten later!

I have been thinking of writings that didn’t go into Pennies in the past as leftover food for thought. Still nourishing, it just needs to be gathered. There will be some leftovers in this Penny. I hope you will enjoy the meal!

Included. The Ziegler reunion, a gathering of the descendants of Levi Ziegler, my great-grandfather on Dad’s side of the family, takes place annually on the 2nd Sunday of July back in my hometown of Annville PA. To my Dad, William Ziegler, the reunion was the highlight of the year! Not only did he enjoy the food, but the clan always honored him as the oldest of many, many cousins. The proximity of his July 13 birth date prompted a rousing rendition of “Happy Birthday” each year. I too enjoyed the reunions, and though we lived over 200 miles away in New York, attended them fairly regularly as long as I could.

In August, 2015 I received a card and note from Anna Mae Ludwig, a friend from childhood, who with her husband John, still lives in the county where we were raised. She wrote, “Glen Ziegler came to our house with something special he received at the Ziegler Reunion this year. It was the words you wrote for the tune of ‘Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus,’ with the name ‘Going Home.’ He said they sang it at the reunion. And I was so delighted he brought a copy for us! Was good and John and I were singing it too.”

Anna Mae’s sister Reba, now deceased, had married Glen, one of Dad’s younger cousins, hence the connection to the Ziegler reunion and his subsequent visit to the Ludwigs. I was delighted, of course, that my song is being sung and shared! It made me feel included, almost as if I had been been there! That was another taste of eternity, where there is no time or space. Thanks to all who made this possible!

Want to sing that song along with the Zieglers and Ludwigs? Here are the words:

GOING HOME

*By Verna Kwiatkowski. A Sky View poem. Based on
1 Cor. 15:51,52 and 1 Thess. 4:13-18. May be sung
to the tune of Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus.*

Caught up! Caught up with Jesus to meet him in the air,
With joy we rise to greet him, delighted to be there!
The trumpet call has sounded with notes both loud and clear,
The voice of God commanded: "Come, children, gather near."

What joy when first we see him, our Savior, King, and Lord,
He gave to us salvation, which we could not afford.
Set free from all earth's shackles, and able now to soar,
We're heading for our homeland to live forevermore!

When we arrive in Heaven, and shed our final tear,
We'll take in our surroundings with heightened eye and ear.
How glorious the vision, so precious to behold!
Transformed, we gaze in wonder: the half had not been told!

The Mets – and More! Several times in earlier Pennies I mentioned my enjoyment of baseball, and that I especially follow the New York Mets in the National League. 2015 was a particularly good year to be a Mets fan! They showed promise all year, especially in the second half of the long season, and when the regular games were all played, the Mets were #1 in their division!

Then came the post-season games, held in both the National and American Leagues (NL & AL). By winning a 5 game series that opens the post-season AND the 7 game series that follows, one team in each league wins the PENNANT, a high honor indeed! This year the AL pennant was won by the Kansas City Royals, and the winners of the NL pennant were – the Mets! Both these teams would now play each other in the 7 game set called the World Series, another honor, and the winner would be called world champions!

In the days between the Mets winning the pennant and the start of the World Series, this story took an unexpected turn. It began when my son George came into my room bearing a gift from Susan, his wife Janet's sister. It was a Mets tee shirt in their colors of blue and orange, touting their pennant victory and looking forward to the World Series yet to come. Susan had noticed the shirts being sold in New York City, thought of me, and bought it, asking George to deliver it to me. George hung the shirt in my room where it could be seen by all. I enjoyed the surprise behind the gift as much as the gift itself! Thank you, Susan!

It so happened that the World Series started in one of the busiest weeks of the year here at Sky View – the week leading up to the annual Halloween costume parade, this year held on Friday, October 30. In all the 9 previous Halloweens since I moved into Sky View, I never donned a costume, yet always attended the parade, because I enjoyed

seeing the creativity of the staff and residents. If anyone asked about my lack of costume, I smiled and said, "I'm dressed as a nursing home resident!"

But this year was different, due to the shirt on display. One evening I noticed that the hand towel I was using was the same shade of orange as the towels Mets fans sometimes wave to cheer on their team. That's when my mind began playing the "What If" game: What if I wore the shirt over my other clothes, draped the towel over the arm of my chair, asked the activities staff for two balloons (one blue and one orange) to tie together on the back of my chair – and perhaps for a fan as well? And what if I programmed my LightWriter to say LET'S GO METS!

Well, on the day of the parade I did get dressed as I had imagined, except there was no fan. By then I had also realized that many people would have no idea what I was trying to depict, so I typed a supply of papers with the following explanation to use as needed:

Dressed in the Mets' colors of blue and orange,
wearing a tee shirt that correctly identifies the Mets as
NATIONAL LEAGUE PENNANT WINNERS!,
and with my computer programmed to say:
LET'S GO METS!,
you may have correctly guessed that
I am parading as
A METS' FAN!

At the Staff competition annually I make it a point to look up Diane Gitelson, our director of social work. At this event we get to see Diane's playful side, and she certainly has one! This year her office dressed as the characters from Charlotte's Web, which explains why she was disguised this year as a PIG! With her torso wrapped in pink, and a snout attached to her nose, Diane dropped to her hands and knees and crawled and oinked her way past the judges' stand and into a group prize!

The next week during our 4th floor meeting with Diane, I left, as usual, to keep an appointment with my aide. As I was returning, I heard a gasp coming from the Day Room. I could think of only one thing that could have caused such a gasp: Diane must have announced her retirement. And so it was! Diane's last day will be December 31! Among other things, I will remember Diane as a good sport, and try to learn from her.

After the Mets lost the World Series to the Royals, 4 games to 1, some people asked if the results disappointed me, and I said no. First of all, how could I be disappointed in a team that played well enough to win the pennant? Then, too, I am not a true fanatic. I don't like to have my emotions bouncing around between elation and despair. If I find myself getting upset over how the Mets are playing, I won't watch them until my emotions settle down and I again can enjoy the game.

But the main reason I was not disappointed has to do with an incident in the life of my daughter MaryBeth when she was in high school. I was surprised one day to see that she had come home at the regular time. "Isn't this the day you were to go to New York City to see a play?" I asked. "Yes," she said, "but I missed the bus." I expressed my sympathy and hoped she was not too disappointed. "No," she said cheerfully. "In the light of all eternity, I figure it doesn't matter whether I see that play or not."

IN THE LIGHT OF ALL ETERNITY – what a way to live! Notice that this was my daughter’s personal perspective that she was stating; she was not evaluating the play itself. It’s been more than 35 years since MaryBeth’s words of wisdom were spoken in our living room and stored in my head to be used as needed. They came in handy as it became clear that the Mets were going to lose the World Series. “In the light of all eternity,” I thought, “it doesn’t matter if the Mets win or lose the World Series in 2015.” Hence, no disappointment!

2015 Visits, the Weather, & Fall Colors. Looking back at the year 2015, which ended a few weeks ago, there are some stories I must tell to make this Penny complete. All of them fall under the title I have chosen. There were many unusual visits last year. The first was early in January, when our five children planned a weekend reunion, prompted by Paul’s visit from California with his wife Brandi. What the children could not plan was the weather, but this was the one weekend in a blustery snowy record-breaking winter which comfortably and safely accommodated their travel, including David driving from North Carolina and MaryBeth from Massachusetts, along with George and Marty driving locally. Thank you, Lord!

The highlight of the reunion, as far as I was concerned, took place in the main living room (MLR) here at Sky View on Saturday afternoon. The entire room had been reserved for our gathering, and we made good use of the space! We started out with one large circle of chairs, which then turned into several smaller groupings as family members visited with each other. (There were twelve of us in the MLR; two more joined the group for dinner in a restaurant that night, which, of course, I could not attend.) As I sat there observing the various interactions with Leo and me and with each other, the words of my Grandma Hicks, uttered during my teenage years, again proved themselves to be true. When thinking of her own 5 children, 2 of whom lived at a distance, she used to say, “It’s not the MILES between you that matter; what counts is the FEELINGS between you.” Well said, Grandma! Our cups of love were splashing all over each other that day – as they do every day!

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Other 2015 visits made me face the fact that our grandchildren, for the most part, have completed the childhood phase of their lives and become adults, not only legally, but in maturity as well. MaryBeth and Charles Dyer visited in the spring, bringing with them John and Graham, our 2 youngest grandchildren. At the time Graham was 16 and John was 18, looking every bit like a man preparing to leave home for college. Previously I had watched George’s 3 sons become men and move away to live and work, Eric to NYC, Evan to Florida, and Andrew to Massachusetts. Sometimes (as in 2015) they come to see me at Sky View when they come to visit their parents, other family members, and each other. I enjoy these talks!

How delighted I was to hear that 2 of our granddaughters were planning to visit us by themselves in the summer! First David’s daughter Amy came from North Carolina. She was driving solo to New England to spend time with a long-time friend who was now living and working there. Amy planned her trip so that she could spend a day visiting with her New York relatives, including me! Then about a month later Paul’s daughter Sophia flew from California to New York to spend several days among the same pool of

relatives. Yes, two young, adventurous WOMEN whom I had last seen as mid-teenage girls, located my room and popped in for welcome visits!

In the autumn two of our grandsons did something very adult – they got married! At the end of September Paul's son Robert married Victoria in California, and at the end of October David's son John married Katlyn in North Carolina. And so – our family is expanding! All of our grandchildren, including Paul's daughter Andi and David's son Paul, know I did not expect to live this long; I gave them their legacy from me more than a decade ago, saying: "I don't know whether I have 3 months or 3 years to live." I still don't know!

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There were 2 more surprise visits in the fall. One of them was from my first cousin Barbara, who lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The daughter of my mother's younger sister, Barbara had kept in touch by sending cards and notes several times a year, but I never expected to see her in person again. Another first cousin, Louise, who lives in North Carolina, keeps in touch through weekly letters. Daughter of my Mom's older sister, Louise gets phone calls from Barbara, which she selectively describes in her weekly letters to me. That's another link between Barbara and me. In 2015 Barbara sent a note indicating that she really wanted to see me. Barbara is a woman who gets things done! Before long I had a date and then one Saturday there she was in my room! She was on her way to India and stopped in for a visit, along with her hired driver, on the way to the airport. The reunion was significant for both of us. Though Barbara is seven years younger than I, we lived near each other in childhood and were an important part of each other's lives. Thank you Barbara! And thank you Louise!

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I think there is a connection between the weather in summertime and the intensity of color on the trees in the fall. I don't remember what the connection is supposed to be, but I DO know this: in all the years that I have sat at my window drinking in the fall colors here at Sky View, NEVER have the leaves been as varied and vibrant as in 2015! And when Paul told us that he and Brandi planned an October visit – "Twice in one year!" he exclaimed – I hoped God's artistry still would be shining brightly when they arrived, especially for Brandi, who had never seen such a show before. It was! I like to think God put on a special show just for us last fall, for my God does things like that!

Freedom Papers. At Sky View, residents and staff members sometimes come to me as if I were their pastor, seeking advice or teaching. If I know I have written something on that subject in the past, I may direct them to the place in my room where they can get a copy for themselves. Or I may engage them in conversation right away, via my Light-Writer that sits on my lap always ready to speak what I have typed.

But other times I recognize that a generic answer could be useful for people with similar questions. I call these practical papers "Freedom Papers," in honor of the Set Free! seminars I taught in the 1980s. I wrote this latest paper in the summer of 2015. When my son George read it, right away he said it belonged in Penny. Here it is! If you find it helpful, feel free to use it for the glory of God.

Tips for believers who want to honor Christ when things go wrong.

Question: What do you do when there is friction among coworkers and you are being treated unfairly?

Answer: Here are 4 things you can do in this situation. Read them all before working on them. They all work together, and all are important.

1. **EXAMINE YOURSELF.** Might some of your actions have helped to bring on this current situation? The Bible says "In the same way we judge others, we will be judged," and how true that is! If something comes to mind here, are you willing to change, with God's help? Romans 12:18 says: "*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*"

2. **REMIND YOURSELF** that nothing is too hard for God. Have a positive attitude. God can make something beautiful out of things that start out ugly!

3. **GUARD YOUR TONGUE!** Read James 3:1-12. At the trial of Jesus, Pilate was amazed that he did not say anything when people were saying awful, untrue things about him. There is a time to be quiet and a time to speak. Follow God's directions in your case. Moses said, "The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still."

4. **"LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU,"** Jesus said. God loves everybody, and wants his people to do the same.

An Anniversary! Before I came to Sky View, my friend Lois Duryea was the person I knew who had resided in a nursing home longer than any other – 10 years. After multiple strokes, she agreed to try living in a nursing facility for 1 year, which quickly (or so it seemed to me!) turned into 10. To her delight, Lois and the activities department found out she had a talent for painting pictures, and that was her hobby for the rest of her days.

Soon after I arrived at Sky View I asked Judy, a 4th floor resident who looked younger than most of the rest of us, how long she had lived here. "10 years," she said, and then added cheerfully, "My family took care of me as long as they could." Judy became a role model for me during the next 5 or 6 years until her death. Never did I hear any criticism or complaining passed through her lips; rather, her lips were used to praise the residents, the staff, and yes, her God! Thanks, Judy!

And then it happened – December 29, 2015 arrived, bringing with it the 10th anniversary of my moving into Sky View! To me, the years have flown by, until I think of things like this: When I moved here I was not quite finished with the original Penny essay, and here I am about to complete Penny #40! I am so glad to have the entire 10 years recorded in this form. I wonder how they would read as a book?

Sauerkraut – from Sky View Service, October 2015. After years of thinking about this story, I wrote it in 2008 as part of an essay called "God Will Take Care of You." Then

in September, 2015 I wanted to use the story in our monthly service here at Sky View. It's length, however, forced me to postpone its use, making it a "Leftover," though not for long. Besides appearing in the October service, here it is in Penny 40, still in the format we used for Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends. Enjoy!

Cliff – The meditation we had to cut last month for lack of time is called SAUERKRAUT, and is a meditation on Romans 8:28. Before we begin, let's read Romans 8:28 together. (Read 2X)

***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who are the called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).*

SAUERKRAUT: A meditation on Romans 8:28 – Leo & Marilyn (initials)

L – Verna says: I have been meditating on that verse for over 50 years, yet when I was writing the essay "God Will Take Care Of You" in 2008 a new thought came to mind that I will now pass on to you.

M – Have you ever made homemade bread? After the ingredients are assembled, they must be kneaded together until they form a well-blended dough, which then is allowed to rise. The next step is to knead the dough again, and perhaps a third time, until finally it is ready to be formed into a loaf and baked. Then it is ready to be eaten, the purpose for which the process was begun.

L – Sometimes "kneading" the dough is aptly called "working" the dough, for it does require effort as well as skill to prepare the dough properly. In Romans 8:28 I can picture God as the Master Baker, working (that is, kneading) together all the ingredients that come into our lives, adding some of his own for balance, getting his children ready to fit into his good purpose for them. Part of that purpose is that we might be nourishing bread for others, reflecting our Lord, who becomes the Bread of Life to all who will come to him and eat.

M – Once I bought a loaf of pumpernickel sauerkraut bread, anxious to see how it would taste. Being raised in the Pennsylvania Dutch culture, sauerkraut was a staple in our home, and I liked it. In fact, pork and sauerkraut, in our family supplemented by mashed potatoes and applesauce, was the traditional meal for New Year's Day! But I could not imagine tangy, salty, stringy sauerkraut as an ingredient in bread! As I savored my first bite, I realized how wrong I was to doubt the wisdom of the baker. The sauerkraut flavor was very subtle, not overpowering, as I had suspected. No sauerkraut was visible; the fine grain showed how well the ingredients had been blended. In addition, I found the bread to be delightfully moist, a good quality I attributed to the sauerkraut.

L – Now back to the analogy of God as the Master Baker. I can see our lives being assembled in individual bowls. Besides the usual ingredients, each bowl contains some "sauerkraut." Mine includes some labeled primary lateral sclerosis, along with allergies; yours have different labels. Every time more sauerkraut is added to our bowls, God adds more of his own special ingredients, such as GRACE, MERCY, HOPE, and LOVE – lots and lots of LOVE! As he kneads the dough until the consistency is just right, we may find that we no longer consider our "sauerkraut" to be "bad," since it produces such good results!

M – And so, if you are one who loves God, don't worry. No matter WHAT comes into your life, whether sweet or sour, you can count on this: God knows how to make the end product good, and God WILL take care of you. Amen.

New Year's Blessings and a Challenge. I'm writing this on the last day of January, 2016. In my opinion it's not too late to wish you New Year's blessings and to give us all a challenge for the New Year, so here they are:

Blessings – 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. (Rom. 15:13)

Challenge – Let's live a life of LOVE, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 5:2)

Love, Verna

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