A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS – 5

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER, 2006

Time to start volume 5 of the “Penny” essays. I have some catching up to do!

Saturday, September 16, 2006. Labor Day weekend was exciting this month, for it brought company from afar. Our son Paul flew in from California with his wife Marita and children Sophia (15), Amanda (13), and Robert (RJ) (12). At the same time our daughter MaryBeth and her husband Charles Dyer drove here from Massachusetts with their sons John (9) and Graham (7). All nine of them were in my room together several times. It was wonderful!

Friday evening there was a family cookout at George and Janet’s house. Also attending were their sons Evan (17) and Andrew (14), Marty, Leo and Janet’s parents. But I was at Sky View. Paul said it felt strange to him not to have me at the gathering. The last family event I attended was more than two years ago. I think I have adapted well to my situation in that I don’t mind people getting together without me; I accept the fact that I simply can’t go. Nor do I want to, because more than mechanics is involved here. It is so difficult to have lost control of my emotions. In that “last family event” that I attended, I began to cry for no particular reason and could hardly stop. Am I just being self-conscious? Perhaps I should let people see that PLS has robbed me of normal emoting in addition to my walking and talking. My family, including the grandchildren, is adjusting quite well, I think, to my condition. I attribute that to the grace of God, for we are a faith family. And I’m grateful.

Sunday, September 17, 2006. Over the Labor Day weekend a tender incident occurred that I want to recount. It happened when just MaryBeth and her family were in my room. The nurse came in to give me my medication. I indicated to her that it was all right with me if the family remained in the room during the procedure. The boys knew I had a feeding tube but had not seen it. MaryBeth told them they didn’t have to watch if they didn’t want to, but they did. The nurse got the tube out from under my shirt and started her work. “Grandma is getting her medicine and a drink of water,” my daughter explained.

After the nurse left, the boys began to wonder exactly where the tube entered my stomach. No, not at my belly button, I replied to their guess. Then John lifted his shirt, exposing the scar running down the center of his chest from the open heart surgery he had when he was three. “Is it here where my scar ends?” he wanted to know. That was just about right! So I lifted my shirt enough to show them the opening at the other end of the tube - in the center just under my rib cage. Both were very much interested. And I enjoyed the intimacy of the moment.

Sunday, September 24, 2006. Several people have asked me why I call the time between waking up and getting out of bed “mulching” time. I don’t recall giving any thought to the name; it just seemed to fit what I was doing: lying there all cozy in my bed. Perhaps subconsciously it had something to do with the mulch I used to put around the plants in my flower bed. To the eye of the beholder, the mulching material might seem to be just lying there in bed, but much more is going on. That material is fertile, nutritious; it is feeding the plants as well as protecting them. My own mulching time is fertile and creative also, with ideas being fed and protected. I think it is well named.

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Yesterday I went to Drum Hill for my second visit since leaving there almost 9 months ago. As with my April trip, Marty accompanied me and we used a Paratransit bus to get there and back. I’m so glad for that form of transportation, including the friendly drivers. What a reception I got at Drum Hill! Leo had spread the word that I was coming. The smiles, hugs, kisses and kind words that I received refreshed my soul and spirit. People remembered - and missed - the Friday worship services. We did have wonderful times together when I lived there. Precious memories!

I had news to impart to my friends concerning Ann, a Drum Hill resident who was a member of our congregation there. Friday morning I was talking with Gloria, our recreation director at Sky View, about a Scripture and prayer service that my friends and I plan to start on the first Thursday of the month, beginning in October. Gloria worked briefly in Drum Hill while I was there and was familiar with the worship service. She had been telling me about the requests for Bible study and prayer, asking me to think about what could be done. During our conversation she mentioned that Ann was here for rehabilitation. A few hours later I was sitting with Ann - a joyful reunion! One of the first things she asked was whether I had a service here. I told her about October 5 and she said she will come if she is still here, for Ann is going to an assisted living facility after her rehabilitation at Sky View is completed. I was so encouraged by Ann's continuing interest in services.

Do you see all the interconnection in the above paragraphs? Marty explained to me that World Wide Web is so named because there are many links from one piece of information to another, to another, to still another that it's like a spider's web. Amazing as the Internet may seem, it pales in comparison to God's ability to make connections! The events of Friday and Saturday are just one example from my life. God's ways are awesome indeed!

Tuesday, September 26, 2006. Ever since Marty gave me a new printout about primary lateral sclerosis (PLS), I have wanted to write about my own symptoms as compared to the printed material, along with some of my history. Now the time has come. I will put in italics any direct quotes I use.

SYMPTOMS OF PLS

From the Spastic Paraplegia Foundation, Inc.
http://www.sp-foundation.org/pls.htm

The hallmark of PLS is progressive weakness and spasticity of affected voluntary muscles. Symptoms usually begin with tripping or difficulty lifting the legs. Onset is gradual. Symptoms eventually include the legs, arms, hands and speech and swallowing muscles.

Looking back, I would say my symptoms began with occasional leg spasms, usually when I was lying down. There were also a few falls with no apparent cause. Then came problems with my speech that only I seemed to notice. It felt like my tongue would get stuck, causing my words to pile up and come out garbled. My hands began to weaken, which I attributed to ageing. I was puzzled when papers started slipping from my fingers.

All this was before June, 2002, when an event occurred that let me know something was definitely wrong. I was walking across our lawn toward the mailbox when suddenly my left leg was struck by a strong jolt that felt like an electrical shock; it caused me to stumble. I knew the blow came from within, indicating a neurological problem. In July I began to fall. Sometimes my foot stuck to the floor and I would fall; other times, especially when I was stepping down, my leg seemed to collapse within itself as if it had no bone. I could no longer trust my legs and wondered if I should use a cane.

In September I saw a neurologist and testing began. In February, 2003, I fell in a shoe store when my foot stuck to the floor. The result was a broken hip. After that, I never again walked without an assistive device, moving from cane to walker to Powerchair (August, 2004). In July, 2003, a second neurologist diagnosed me with PLS. Since it is so rare, he sent me to Mt. Sinai Hospital in NYC, where a specialist confirmed his diagnosis.

While in the hospital for hip surgery, I was found to have pneumonia, probably caused by aspiration. I had been having choking/coughing spells caused by swallowing liquids or even saliva.

After a couple swallowing evaluations, increasing food restrictions and more pneumonia, I had a feeding tube installed in June, 2005, shortly after I began using a Lightwriter for communicating, as my speech was almost gone.

My arms and hands, legs and feet go into spasms now, mostly when I am in bed; the spasms are not painful. The literature states that there may be a problem with drooling. Oh, yes! I do have that problem! I take medication both for spasms and for saliva reduction. Hyperactive reflexes are also mine. My startle reflex is so severe that people are always apologizing for scaring me. Any noise might make me fling my arms violently enough to clear my lap of its contents.

And then comes this sentence: *Some individuals report having emotional lability*. My emotional responses are very unstable and changeable, unlike the way they used to be. I can go from laughing to crying and vice versa in seconds. And so many things make me cry: anything sentimental or sweet, anything about the holiness of God, other people crying (even on TV), the memory of times when I cried, the frustration I feel when people demand that I answer them with words rather than with typing, and more. (In contrast, I was the pastor who joyously officiated at my daughter's wedding and who comforted the grieving, keeping tears under control.) Anything to do with my throat has been affected by PLS. My laughing and crying is so loud that my door must be closed, and it continues far longer than I would want it to, often ending with coughing. If there were one thing that I would like to tell people now, it would be this: PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT MY UNUSUAL EMOTIONAL RESPONSES ARE A SYMPTOM OF MY DISEASE AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT HOW I AM FEELING NOW. THANK YOU.

Thursday, October 5, 2006. What a day this has been! This afternoon, nine months after my arrival at Sky View, the first service of "Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends" was held here. I really thought when I left Drum Hill that the worship services were over, despite the insistence of some friends that it was only a matter of time. After regaining some strength at Sky View, I began the same purposeful mingling with the residents that I did at Drum Hill. I felt that if I were to be a good ambassador for Christ in my new residence, I must get to know the people and let them know me. I used essays and pages from Words of Encouragement to help with this task.

Meanwhile certain friends from the outside kept in touch with me, some with weekly visits. A team was being formed by God for a future assignment! When the assignment was revealed - hold a monthly service at Sky View - everything fell into place so beautifully! My job was to plan and write the half hour service and let the rest up to others. I used the liturgical materials we had used at Drum Hill and wrote a new sermon for this new beginning. And then the time came!

It was wonderful watching the group assemble. The team members for this first service (Cliff Cullum, Frank Hetzer, my husband Leo, and our pianist Carol Thorne) were there early, handling details. Then the recreation and transportation staff members began bringing people in wheelchairs while others came on their own, some with walkers. Carol began playing at 1:45. Some people sang along with the familiar hymns she used for the 15 minute prelude. Then more of my friends came, two of them bringing friends I had never met before. The people filled the living room area and overflowed into the dining room. All told, we numbered about 50, almost 35 of us being residents. And we all had handout sheets, prepared by Cliff.

From 2:00 to 2:25 we read Scriptures, sang, heard a sermon and prayed together, and our Father in Heaven, who had assembled us, was glorified. Immediately after the last blessing, Carol began to play again (something unplanned) and the result was amazing: people remained quiet, some with heads bowed, and nobody moved until the song ended. Such is the power of the Holy Spirit! And now we will prepare for and await November 2, when, Lord willing, we will gather again to worship God.

PS: Ann was not at the service. She moved to an assisted living facility yesterday.

Sunday, October 15, 2006. This week I had an unexpected fall foliage ride down county. Let me tell you about it. First of all, the view from my window shows that the leaves are still mostly green, quite unusual for this time of year. A tinge of change began to show perhaps ten days ago but we have not had the brilliant blaze of color that we usually associate with fall here in the Northeast. Somehow it is weather connected. I will keep looking and appreciating what I see as long as the leaves remain.

Early last week the cap fell off the part of my feeding tube that leads to the balloon in my stomach. I didn't know if that meant the balloon had deflated, but when drops of water splashed on my shoe when I stood on the lift, I became suspicious. The nurses knew about this, but since the tube continued to work, nothing was done. Then early Wednesday evening when the nurse poured my medicine down the tube, it came out through my stoma (the hole in my stomach) and onto my clothing! Now I knew the tube was coming out and the doctor had to be called. Given the choice of going to the ER that evening or waiting and going to the doctor's office on Thursday, I chose the latter, trying to avoid an overnight stay in the hospital. The nurse taped the tube to my abdomen so it would remain inserted, but I would have to forgo my overnight feeding and all medicine until I had a replacement.

Thursday came and clearly on my mind was the essay I wrote about my similar adventure in March: This Is the Day. "Yes," I decided, "I will rejoice and be glad in this day that the Lord has made, no matter what it brings to me." My appointment was made for 3:00 and it would be at the ER after all. but in my doctor's private quarters. "It won't take long," I was told. I would go by ambulette, meaning I would be going on my chair, and an aide named Hilary would go with me. It's nice to have others handle all the details!

I enjoyed the change of scenery, although the trees looked the same as the ones I see from my room: mostly green. The paperwork was handled quickly at the hospital and Hilary and I were ushered into a room where our wait began. [Waiting is such a useful skill to develop in your life! It comes in handy in all sorts of situations. I have learned how to wait, so I know it's possible to do so.] The doctor arrived at 6:00, citing miscommunication between Sky View and his office for the delay. I was just glad to see him.

Then another problem emerged: how could he examine me when I could not get onto the examining table? We reclined my chair as far as possible and the doctor did the best he could. His big surprise was to find that the tube was basically out; one quick tug and it was no longer attached to me. He tried to insert another tube of the same kind but couldn't get it in. I suppose the stoma had begun to close up on the inside. After more attempts, the doctor decided to insert a catheter to maintain the opening, keep me in the hospital overnight and do the job right with an endoscopy Friday afternoon, the earliest an anesthesiologist would be available to work with him. He said he would use the same hole if possible, but he might have to make a new opening into my stomach. That gave me something else to process!

And so the adventure continued. Hilary stayed until a room was found for me; then she returned to Sky View. I certainly enjoyed her company and appreciated her help that day. Meanwhile I was escorted to 543-2, where a swinging lift was used to transfer me from my chair to bed. An interesting feature of that lift is that it also functions as a scale. Someone took my shoes off and while I was dangling, my weight was registered! I was pleased with the number, for it indicated that I am losing weight. At Sky View I had gained over 20 pounds on the same 1500 calories per day that I was getting at Drum Hill. Obviously, I didn't need that much anymore. Three weeks ago my diet was changed to 1200 calories a day and it's working! I don't get hungry on my new diet.

That leads me to another benefit of my unexpected hospital stay: I feel as if I have had a physical checkup in addition to a new tube! I had all my vital signs taken several times, plus 2 EKG's, a chest x-ray to rule out pneumonia, and extensive blood work. I'm glad all of that was done. For a second day I would not be getting my food or medicine, but at least I would be hydrated through my veins. Soon the tubing was inserted, the bag hung, and the water was dripping into me.

I was also adorned with three new bracelets. On my right arm were a hospital ID and a pink strip marking that arm as off limits for any sort of tests and on my left was a blue strip indicating that I had signed a DNR. I was amazed at the flood of emotions the blue bracelet brought to me! Instead of being theoretical, my DNR was now specific. Was I willing to enter eternity tomorrow or would I rather be resuscitated if something went wrong? I wrestled with that thought until I was more than willing to keep the bracelet on.

My daughter-in-law Janet had come to Sky View to visit me Wednesday evening and found out that I would be having a tube change the next day. She immediately went into action in her own special style: quietly, efficiently, intensely, calmly and all for the glory of God. Because of the way she works, I really don't know all that she did on my behalf. Great will be her reward in Heaven! Our whole family and many others will surely rise up and call her blessed! Already she knows how very much we appreciate her. I know Janet informed family members about my situation, including George, who was in California on a business trip. She also went to the hospital ER, but left without seeing me, mistakenly thinking I had been discharged. Then she appeared at my bedside Thursday evening, just in time to pay for one day's use of the TV set! (The NY Mets were playing a post-season game that night. I had followed the baseball team all season and certainly wanted to see that game.) Janet stayed until I was settled in for the night.

Friday morning I was surprised and delighted to find daughter Marty at my bedside! She ended up taking the whole day off from work to be with me, serving in many capacities including mouthpiece, advocate and companion. I had thought I could do without someone with me, but God, Marty and Janet thought otherwise; I bow to their good judgment!

A special treat that morning was the reaction of the male aide who came to get me bathed and dressed. When he saw my Lightwriter, his face lit up and he said, "I remember you from the last time! It was about six months ago, on the sixth floor on the other side of the hall. We had a good conversation. I sat down and you used your machine. Do you remember?" "Yes," I said. "I do remember." He and his female partner gave me good care. In fact, they gave me a special treat: they slipped an air mattress under me and inflated it. How comfortable it was!

My procedure was scheduled for 2:00. Well before that time, Janet arrived with a bag containing items from my room in Sky View: clean clothing and the charger for my Lightwriter. I had not requested these things. I was planning to go home in the clothing I had worn to the hospital, but that was not acceptable to Janet. I had also remembered a few times when my Lightwriter had not been put on charge over night, yet it worked the next day. Therefore I was not really concerned about my communication device, but Janet was. No detail is too small for her to address. Sounds like a godly characteristic, doesn't it?

Both Marty and Janet went with me as I was transported on a stretcher to Endoscopy. The nurse suggested that they wait with me to help me relax until the doctor arrived. The women, seeing that I was practically asleep and knowing that I was in God's hands, went across the hall to the waiting room. As they suspected, I was meditating on and thoroughly believing Isaiah 41:13. That's a powerful relaxant! The doctor came, reviewed the procedure with me, got Marty's signatures of consent, and soon I was sound asleep.

When I awoke a short time later, my doctor was at my side. He explained that he had used the same hole, but in order to do that he had to give me a different kind of tube, one with a mushroom at the end rather than a balloon. Something he said made me cry. I don't know if it was gratitude that he had used the same hole, general relief or concern about the different kind of tube, but once I started, I could not stop. Nor could I control the volume. Before long I was wailing so loudly that I knew the sound reached the waiting room. I sounded like a spoiled little girl intent on getting her own way. I felt so sorry for my doctor! How I wanted to say, "This is a symptom of PLS. It has nothing to do with you." But I couldn't do that. All I could do is hope that somehow he understood.

Soon Marty and I were back in my room. Janet had left to provide her son Andrew with some needed transportation. Then began a very strange two hour period during which I was alternately being prepared to go home and being told I had to stay overnight and return to Sky View the next morning. Marty kept going between my bed and the nurses' station, getting information and relaying it to me. At one point I told her I wouldn't mind staying another night as the bed was comfortable and I could watch the ball game from there. The final word came about 5:30: I would be going home by ambulance at 7:30 and my chair would be returned to Sky View that evening by a member of the hospital security staff. With all in order, Marty left to return home.

I was actually glad to go home on a stretcher. I'm not sure I would have been able to drive safely so soon after anesthesia. It was about 8:00 when I was wheeled into my room. "Hello," said a sweet, welcoming voice. Yes, Janet was at Sky View to make sure the transition went well. It did. My chair actually spent the night at the hospital, arriving home at 10:00 Saturday morning, just before I needed it.

It is now Friday evening, October 20. I've spent six days writing this story, all the time heading toward a wonderful conclusion: I like my new feeding tube! My nurses all like it, too. Unlike my other ones, this is a clear tube. It seemed funny at first watching my medicine go down, especially the red liquids. There has been no clogging AND, also unlike my previous ones, this tube does not leak!! Who could ask for anything more?

Sunday, November 5, 2006. Three days ago we held our second service at Sky View, the second convening of Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends. What a good time we had worshiping the Lord together! I had not thought of these programs as worship services when they were first in the planning stages, as I didn't know if the format I used in Drum Hill would work in a nursing Home. In particular, I didn't know if the people here would sing. Now I know: oh, yes, they will! Actually, the only real difference between these services and the former ones is that these are about ten minutes shorter. The HUGE similarity is that the presence of the Lord is clearly felt as we gather. Isn't that what Jesus said would happen when even two or three people gathered in his name?

The team consisted of Cliff, Frank, and Leo, with Earl Brown at the piano. There were a few more residents there than the last time and about the same number of others. Noticeably absent both times was my son George, who faithfully sat by my side week after week in Drum Hill, taking over more and more of the service as my voice and other skills waned. Both of us had to deal with the truth that he simply could not be here on a weekday afternoon; God, the Comforter, did his good work in us. And then he filled our cups to overflowing! Gloria asked me if we could sometimes do a service on a Sunday afternoon. George was thrilled and Janet, quickly and quietly, suggested the Sunday after Thanksgiving, which was fine with Gloria. Cliff announced this week that on Sunday, November 26, at 2:30 there will be a Thanksgiving Service with Verna and Family, conducted by George with participation by his sons Andrew (violin) and Evan (trumpet).

I must take time right now to marvel at the ways of God. When the worship services at Drum Hill ended abruptly after the Christmas service last year with my move to Sky View, both George and Cliff let me know what a huge loss that was to them. They were serving the Lord with gladness, not out of a sense of duty. Frank entered my life sometime last fall. My daughter Marty, who attends the same church as Frank, clearly sees the hand of God behind the two of us becoming acquainted. Frank was looking for ways to serve the Lord. When Marty told him about me, he said, "I'll visit her weekly," and he did, continuing the practice when I moved to Sky View. Cliff and Frank reacted the same way when I told them in September that there would be services starting in October. They each brightened and said, "May I help?" But with George there was a longing that I deeply felt. Now I can see all this as another wonderful example of God's putting desires in the hearts of these men that he fully intended to satisfy. On the December calendar we have two reservations: Wednesday afternoon Dec. 6 for Scripture and Prayer with Verna and Friends and

Sunday afternoon Dec. 24 for Christmas Service with Verna and Family. Marvel at God along with me! As Janet says, “To God be the glory; great things he is doing!”

Friday, December 1, 2006. When I wrote the above entry, I never dreamed that nearly a month would go by before my next one! I had intended to end this journal at the close of November, since none of the other “Penny” essays have gone beyond 3 months. This is a sample of the needless pressure I sometimes put on myself. I am still learning, still processing, still a work in progress. Don’t put me on a pedestal, please! I have plenty of flaws, several of which emerged and combined in November due to circumstances that tested my attitudes and found them wanting. This morning during mulching time I realized that I was at peace inside after 11 days of turmoil and stress. I praised my God, knowing full well that he was the source of my comfort.

Two things happened on Monday, November 20 that left me shaken. I was downstairs at 2:45 when my aide for the 3 to 11 shift arrived. He let me know that the groups of residents assigned to the evening aides on our floor had been completely rearranged by the supervisor and I was no longer on his schedule, effective immediately. This aide, whom I had five days a week and with whom I had developed a comfortable routine, had let me know the change might happen and now the possibility, which had me anxious, was a reality. I went immediately to my social worker and the supervisor and told them I wanted to have my regular aide back. At the same time I wondered if I were doing the right thing. Where was my trust that God would take care of me? Did I want to be labeled as a troublemaker? No matter what the outcome, I would have to see my familiar aide in the hallways that evening while being in the care of someone else, and that hurt.

At 5:00 a salesman came into my room to deliver the new, custom-made power chair that we had ordered a month earlier. My chair had become increasingly uncomfortable to the point where Sky View’s occupational therapist (OT) called in a person to tell me about options for more suitable chairs. Marty was here when he came. He was obviously experienced in adapting chairs to the needs of their occupants and my hopes went up as he described each feature. The biggest change was that my new chair would tilt, giving me the ability to relieve the pressure on my tailbone that came from sitting in one position for so many hours. AND, with the back pillow molding me into a secure position, I would be able to type better! In other words, this chair would be PERFECT, and now it was here!

My chair passed its first test: I liked the way it looked! Then my newly assigned aide used the lift to transfer me from old chair to the new one. As soon as she left, the salesman took hold of my clothing and tugged, for I was sitting off-center. “Uh-oh,” I thought. The molded cushions had sounded so good, but they would work only if I were seated properly, and that would depend on the skill of my various aides combined with my waning strength. By the end of the next hour I was totally dazed. I had been bombarded with information and asked so many questions requiring instant decisions that my head was spinning. I realized that I would have to learn to drive a much more complicated vehicle and wondered if I were physically capable of handling that assignment. Even the method of charging the chair was different and raised my anxiety level. My old chair was so simple; the aides drove it to the Day Room where they plugged it into the wall until I was ready for it the next day. This one was only to be charged until the yellow light turned green and came with a warning that it is possible to overcharge the chair. How could I be sure the requirements were met? Had I just made a huge mistake?

My questioning continued that evening and the next day as I found my tailbone still hurting and my ability to type unchanged. The OT called the salesman who came Wednesday to make adjustments, which did help. He also brought me two other seat cushions to try. One feature I liked from the start was the chair’s ability to tilt. Unfortunately, I usually tilted because I had to relieve the discomfort I felt, even with the new, thicker pillow. The salesman was contacted once again and I am still awaiting that visit.

Meanwhile, my former aide told me he was trying to get his original schedule back again, sometimes mentioning the day when he thought I would have him back. My hopes would rise, only to fall when the plans were changed. Finally I told him not to make any more promises and tried to adjust to the fact that I may never have him again. After all, the aides work under authority; they can't always have their first choice any more than we residents can. I decided I would not make any more complaints about the situation; rather, I would give thanks in all circumstances, knowing that to be the will of God for me in Christ Jesus. And I would try to be more flexible.

All during the 11 days I was well aware of the source of some of my unrest: I was suffering from the fluctuating emotions that come with expectations. "The higher the expectations, the deeper the disappointment if they do not come to pass," I used to teach. How true! Also, I had to face my increasing disability and dependance on others. During those days I pictured myself bedfast, no longer able to write or drive a chair. Was I feeling sorry for myself? I certainly hoped not! I know my inner turmoil showed on the outside, though, for a few people remarked that I didn't seem as happy as usual.

There were some pleasant occurrences at the end of November as well. MaryBeth and family came to spend Thanksgiving with Leo and me. The next day, while Leo, Charles and the boys went to the Botanical Gardens to see the holiday train display, MaryBeth went with me on a visit to Drum Hill by Paratransit. As before, my friends and I were so glad to see each other! I also met a new couple that I would like to get to know better. For the first time I realized that visiting the people at Drum Hill is an act of ministry for me. Wow! Makes me want to go again. I had actually thought I might not need to return there after this trip.

Then on Sunday November 26 at 2:30 we held a "Worship Service with Verna and Family" here at Sky View. For the first time in 11 months George was conducting as service at my place of residence, and his joy was evident to all. Also taking part were his three sons: Andrew and Evan with the violin and trumpet, and Eric, home from college, with a reading. While it seemed like old times, it was also fresh and new, as is fitting in the Lord's work.

Monday, December 11, 2006. It took me ten days to write the above entry. While I added to or edited that entry daily, I did other writing as well. One of my conflicts every day is to decide whether to do "necessary" or creative writing. I want to be creative, that is, work on essays, but "necessary writing" (emails; business notes to aides, nurses, the social worker, the chair salesman, etc.; personal notes to friends; sermons and programs for the services) wins out, often taking all the writing energy I have for the day. There are three essays in various stages of completion that I really want to finish, besides this one. That brings me to another point: I'm wondering if the "Penny" series should be turned into newsletters rather than essays. This series is a combination of creative and necessary writing, being necessary because I give it a deadline of sorts. What do you think?

Tuesday, December 12, 2006. I want to tie up some loose ends now and conclude this piece. My usual frame of mind, which returned to me on December 1, has remained. I am doing better with having a variety of aides. As more of them have me repeatedly, they get used to my needs and preferences; I, in turn, try to remember that my way is not the only way that works. I take one day at a time. The chair salesman came yesterday bringing a new cushion with him. At the end of our time together, I knew that my chair was NOT a huge mistake. My feeding tube is working well. I am content. My blessing to you: Romans 15:13.