**January 4, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 141) Streamers hung from the ceiling and there was a party atmosphere in the air. The nursing care residents were gathered in the dining room listening to a lady sing to taped music, everyone wearing bright, sparkly New Year's Eve hats and shaking noise makers in time to the "oldies" the musician was crooning. Seth happened to be up in a wheelchair, and I thought he might enjoy the music, so we slipped in the back of the room and I tapped my hand on his shoulder in time to the rhythm. Before long, I noticed the activities director was passing out sparkling cider to everyone and she announced that they would soon start the New Year countdown (even though it was only 3:30 in the afternoon!) When I was handed my cup of cider, I couldn't help looking around and comparing how different this was to other New Year's Eve times for our family, where we'd celebrate together at someone's house, doing the countdown and praying in the New Year. I would never have imagined five months ago that this was where we'd be on December 31st. The gravity of the matter hit me so hard that I had to quickly throw out my cider (which I couldn't get past the lump in my throat, anyway) and wheel Seth into the hallway before I burst out in tears. One of the activities directors came out and quietly slipped her arm around me without saying a word. That simple act of kindness said volumes about her understanding of how devastating this situation has been for our family. The truth of Psalm 34:18 echoed in my spirit, *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit".*

Our response as we enter an uncertain 2004 is from Psalm 33:20, "*We wait in hope for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.*" It is so difficult to wait out each day without seeing much change in Seth's coma level. As I sit at his bedside and pray that God would heal him from the crown of his head to the bottom of his feet, I specifically go over each part of his body that needs healing and add a scriptural thought or verse. Maybe this would also be helpful for each of you who so faithfully lift Seth before the Lord.

As I pray that the damage to his brain would be healed, I ask that he might have the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16 - *“But we have the mind of Christ”*). He still has a floating piece of bone in the back of his neck that slightly protrudes into the spinal column, so although he can move his head from left to right he has to wear a neck brace to keep him from dropping his head downward when they sit him up. I pray, *"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord, our maker."* Although his eyes are open, they stare blankly around, and I pray that he might have eyes to see people as Jesus sees them (I Sam. 16:7 - *"Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart"*). He cannot talk yet, but I pray Psalm 118:17, *"I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done."* As I hold Seth's hands, which are mostly still but sometimes squeeze and move, I pray Matt. 20:26, *"He who wants to be great among you must be your servant . . . just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."* Seth's left knee does not bend much yet, and his right foot is slightly twisted which would make it awkward to walk correctly. As I pray for his feet, I remember Isaiah 52:7, *"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news."* In addition to all of these, I pray the words of Ephesians 5:14, *"Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

Thank you for easing the grief our family feels by standing beside us with your prayers, love and concern.

~Mary

**January 16, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 153) It's now been five months to the day when I last heard Seth's voice, when he phoned us from California on the morning of the day of his accident, August 16th.

I always look forward to the days the different therapists come in to work with Seth. Yesterday the speech therapist spent some time with him. One of the things she did was put a little trial partial plug called a pase muer valve over his trache tube which allows him to breath in through the trache but forces him to breath out through his mouth or nose. This is the first step of encouraging Seth to breath normally again. The interesting thing is, with the valve in place, we can hear any sounds that Seth is making. Of course, since he's still in a coma, there's no talking, but it is really neat to hear him cough and recognize it as Seth's voice after such a long period of silence! For those of you who so faithfully pray for our family and have seen Seth's picture on the web site but have never heard his voice, you'll have a chance to do so shortly. We are in the process of creating a new site, and one feature will be that you will be able to download a song he composed shortly before the accident which he was going to sing and play at a friend's wedding in September. We happened to record it when he was home on a weekend last summer before the accident, and now it's priceless for us to hear his voice, playing the guitar and singing.

We long to hear Seth's voice; his laugh, his "Hey, what up?" phone calls every other day when he was in California at school to recount his various adventures and share his dreams or frustrations. I could almost hear his voice when I came across a letter that Seth wrote to his Dad for Craig's birthday a week before the accident. For those who didn't know Seth, but pray for him, I'd like to share a little of his heart in a portion of this letter to his Dad.

*"I wanted to start this letter by saying that you are the greatest Dad in the world. From the day I was born until today when I stepped off the plane, you have been a model of integrity, unconditional love, and spiritual guidance. The beliefs, ideas and necessities of living that you have passed on will carry on through me to my children and grandchildren. I look back over the years and see some of the times we disagreed, only to see the wisdom you gave through loving discipline and direction. Rest assured that your hard work is continuing to move in my life. I am so sad sometimes to know that I am missing life with my family, but at the same time I can see myself turning into the man I am going to be for the rest of my life. I cannot say thank you enough for all the hard work and effort you put forth. Even across 1,000 miles, I can feel your unwavering love, prayers, and hand of guidance touching my life. Another lifelong goal which you have passed on to me is the striving and hunger for wisdom and knowledge. I am a thinker, like you, and I am forever grateful that you have shown me the path of God that leads to life. So on your birthday, with tears in my eyes, I say thank you, and I love you". Seth*

A verse of scripture the Lord impressed upon our family's hearts shortly after the accident was Psalm 118:17 - *"I will not die but live, and will* ***proclaim*** *what the Lord has done."* Please continue to pray that with us.

~Mary

**January 24, 2004**

**A Father’s Perspective**

*Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy* (Psalm 126)

As I glance up from the computer screen my gaze passes out through the window and I see the basketball hoop off to the side of the driveway. It is not difficult to imagine the *thump, thump, thump* of a basketball on the pavement and the little boy heaving the ball upward time and again, or envision, from more recent years, a young man's well-aimed jump shot arching gracefully through that same net. And the tears return.

I have never been a particularly emotional person, and tears have been a strange and recurring companion these past five months, both for me and the rest of my family. Everyone knows that tears are an outward sign of pain or inward distress, and we've surely known that. God only knows what His ultimate plans for Seth are, and we are reminded of the neurologist's pessimism after reviewing the results of an MRI and EEG several months ago, of his prognosis that Seth could remain comatose forever or, at best, would awaken with some degree of retardation. On the other hand, *tears* are one of the small "pegs" that I grasp onto which keep my hopes alive for our son being providentially restored to us, that let me believe God is able to repair a damaged brain if He so chooses. I am not speaking of my tears, but of Seth's.

On a number of occasions we have witnessed tears rolling down Seth's cheeks. Are they just some kind of neurological glitch or could they be an outward sign of inward distress? Certainly the *timing* of these infrequent occasions might indicate the latter and, if so, reveal a certain and encouraging level of thinking and judgment which may be occurring in an otherwise largely unresponsive body. As far back as his stay at Riverside Community Hospital, Mary observed a sudden release of tears when she held Seth's limp hand and informed him that the doctor was about to perform major exploratory surgery on his abdomen to remove a source of infection, and that she was "So, so sorry" for him to have to go through it. Not long ago a friend of ours was sitting at Seth's bedside (an elder from our church) and sensed in him what he thought was frustration, and as he spoke to Seth about being patient and trusting God for recovery, he saw a tear run from Seth's eye to the pillow. Then again, last week several therapists had Seth strapped to an incline board, and one of them was coaxing him to open and close his right hand at her requests. A number of times it appeared that he responded correctly, and at other times not. She believed he was really trying. Suddenly she was startled to see several tears run down his cheek, and informed Mary who was sitting nearby. This brought even more tears—to those of the therapist and to the mother! Was he hearing and mentally processing the requests, and were the tears a sign of his distress and frustration at not being able to react? Most doctors and therapists would shrug their shoulders.

We've heard many reports of comatose patients who, upon awakening, are able to recount things they have heard while in a coma (though never things they have seen). Someday I'd like to ask Seth about those tears. Pray with us that I'll have the opportunity to do so.

~Craig

**February 1, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

We never imagined that our lives would still be so uncertain almost six months after Seth's accident. I have heard our situation described like a movie shown on two screens: Craig, the girls and my life is being played out on one screen and Seth's on the other. We know that our screen would be showing a family on a roller coaster ride, but we continually wonder what it is like for Seth being in a coma. We have heard from people who have known someone in a similar situation, with some persons who report remembering nothing, some a little, and some quite a bit. An article in *Christianity Today*, written by a mother who was in a coma for about two months, described her experience like this: "It was a swimming through mud feeling of trying to surface to awareness. The frightening dreams. The intense and very real spiritual warfare, a battle as unto death. Vaguely registering that people were in my room, but unable to comprehend that, let alone communicate. It was like watching someone through opaque glass underwater, visible but obscure and unreachable. And the weeks of living in the shadowland between my coma and full awareness, with times of frustration beyond belief." We continue to covet your prayers for Seth to awaken completely. *"Awake, O Sleeper, arise from the dead, and the light of Christ will shine upon you."* (Eph. 5:14)

We have indeed experienced a roller coaster ride the past few weeks. It began with Seth doing a few new things which, although small, are always an encouragement. He started moving his left hand a little bit, as well as his left foot and even his leg in small amounts. Up to this point, most of the movements had been on his right side. After keeping his jaw clenched for five months, he started working with the speech therapist to open his mouth and even taste soft foods. But then, just when he was doing so well, he had three seizures one evening. He's been on a low level of anti-seizure medication since the first day and has never had this problem before. Three such closely spaced seizures, unchecked, can trigger a dangerous onset of further seizures, and the grace of God was evident in that Holly was present and could fetch a nurse to administer a seizure-suppressing drug (what if the seizures had occurred in the middle of the night between checkups?). Not only so, but a friend who happens to be an ICU neuro nurse also "happened" to be visiting and could help her walk through the whole scary ordeal. It was also interesting that one of his care givers, who was not on duty at that time, was out driving that evening and the Lord suddenly put a heavy burden on her heart to stop and pray for Seth. She was amazed, as were we, when she arrived at work a few days later and looked at Seth's charts, only to realize that the Lord had had her pray for him at the exact time he was having the seizures. A few days later he developed pneumonia with high temperatures and pulse rates, and so it has been a long week! But then yesterday, the speech therapist was working with him again and he far exceeded his performance of the week before, even opening his mouth several times on command, and keeping his mouth open even as she put pudding on the back of his tongue, and then finally brushing with a toothbrush. She called it a "milestone" for Seth. And so the roller coaster continues up and down, as do our emotions.

The only sure thing we have is our faith in the Lord. We heard speaker and author Ravi Zacharias describe faith this way; *"Faith is a confidence in the person of Jesus Christ and in His power, so even when His power does not serve my end, my confidence in Him remains because of who He is."*

~Mary

**February 14, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 181) There is an old song that I always get a chuckle out of when I think of the first line . . . *"The bluest skies you've ever seen are in Seattle!"* Unbelievably, today it's true as I look out on an unusual cloudless deep blue February sky. But those of us who live here in the Puget Sound area know that the sun is more commonly clouded over, at least partially, except for 54 days a year. That also describes what it is like being in a coma. Seth has small periods of time when it seems like the sun might be shining and he is trying very hard to respond to us and connect. But more commonly, the clouds cover the sun, either completely or partially, as he stares blankly around and we have no idea if he is comprehending where he is, what is being said, or what is going on.

Some of you have wondered what a typical day looks like for me as I care for a son in a coma, and some have suggested that I have a lot of time on my hands to read! Although I never know quite what to expect until I arrive at the care center, there is a bit of a routine. After doing a little normal housework, I jump in the car for the half hour drive to Puyallup and arrive at the care center by 9:00 am. My first task is to take care of Seth's daily grooming needs. A side effect of being comatose is head sweats and his hair is usually matted down, so I start by shampooing and massaging his head. Then comes a shave, face wash, partial body wash, clean pajamas, a small amount of mouth care, creaming and massaging his hands and feet, and putting on fresh pillow sheets and blankets. If Seth understands at all what is happening, it must be very humbling to have anyone else (especially his mother) do these things for him, and emotionally it's hard for me to do these things for a 23-year old son. I talk to him the whole time, explaining about the accident and what has happened in the last six months and where he is now. Then I do therapy on his legs, feet, and arms. After that, I'm ready for a cup of coffee and rest, so I get out the Bible. I started reading the New Testament to him when we arrived at Rainier Vista and I'm just finishing the book of Hebrews, but I also might vary the routine and read some Psalms.

In the afternoons on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, an aide comes in to put him in a wheelchair for a few hours; the upright posture is supposed to help prevent his lungs from getting pneumonia. This involves dressing him and then getting him into a net type contraption that hydraulically lifts him into his chair, a procedure that takes about half an hour to get him up and the same to get him back in bed later. We're out of the room for several hours and most of the elderly folks like me to stop and talk as I wheel him around. On Tuesday afternoons his therapy involves strapping him to a tilt board that is currently set to about 60 degrees; not quite straight up yet, but it gets him used to the sensation of being upright and having his limbs moved. On Thursday afternoons, he is taken into the therapy room where he is seated on a padded table with one therapist holding him in a sitting position while another works his arms and legs. The rest of the afternoon is divided between talking, singing and reading to Seth and having nurses aides, therapists or cleaning gals come through, sometimes taking their breaks in Seth's room to chat.

But at any time a day can take a totally different direction. For instance, yesterday he was coughing up out of his trache tube large amounts of mucous and blood throughout the day (perhaps due to an earlier bout with pneumonia), so I hardly sat down. I had to catch the secretions in a wash rag, put the rag in the hallway laundry basket, wash my hands, and then run back to start the whole procedure over again. I lost count after 50 wash rags of how much work we added for the laundry ladies. A "normal day" of ministering to Seth, all the while wondering if he'll ever be "Seth" again, is stressful enough, but with an added problem like yesterday, I came home 9 hours later physically, emotionally, and spiritually drained. I heard Craig mention the term "basket case" and it was probably pretty accurate!

Continue to pray that Seth will have more "sun breaks" as his brain heals from the trauma of the accident, and that we will have the physical and emotional stamina to continue ministering to Seth, as well as to others that God has put in our path at the care center. *"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."* (Mal. 4:2)

~Mary

**February 25, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 192) As I sat in Seth's room this afternoon listening to a young lady, who is a friend of ours, play the harp for him, I was reminded of the shepherd boy, David, who wrote so many of the Psalms as he played his harp over 3,000 years ago. When Seth was home the week before the accident, Craig's Sunday morning sermon was from the 23rd Psalm, so it was probably the last message Seth had an opportunity to hear. Little did we know how applicable the words of that Psalm, penned so many years before, would be six days later! So much so, that I continue to read, explain and pray through the verses with Seth each day. Let me share a few of the most relevant parts.

*The Lord is my shepherd . . .* (verse 1a) The Lord calls himself the Good Shepherd, and as I understand the role of a caring shepherd, he keeps any of his injured sheep close to his side, giving them special care until they are mended.

*He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside quiet waters* (verse 2). Most people who have recovered from a coma say it is a very dark place, like a long tunnel they cannot seem to get out of. In contrast, I pray for Seth, that as the Shepherd walks close beside him it would be a time of refreshing in his spirit and teaching him trust as he is led by quiet waters and green pastures. Yesterday, for the first time, he had a faint smile on his face while he was sleeping. I wonder if it was a time of special communion with the Lord?

*He restores my soul . . .* (verse 3a) A person's soul is made up of their mind, will and emotions. Those are expressions of the parts of Seth's brain that sustained damage in the accident. We are asking the Lord to restore his ability to reason and communicate, his judgment, his winsome personality, and his creativity.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me* (verse 4). Wow! Never could any of us have imagined, as Craig shared on this verse, that one of us would literally be experiencing this traumatic condition such a short time later, hanging onto life by the barest of a thread. This valley has been for him (and us) a long, arduous trek and, like the psalmist, we look forward to getting through it to the other side some day.

*You anoint my head with oil . . .* (verse 5b) In scripture, anointing with oil is usually associated with the need to be healed or the preparation for a special ministry. Seth's head is specifically what needs healing and we have prayed since before his birth that God would use him greatly for His kingdom.

I don't think it was a coincidence that Craig preached on Psalm 23 on August 10th. How powerful and personal those verses are to us today.

Seth's progress is so agonizingly slow, and it seems like it's been at a standstill for weeks. One of the therapists mentioned to me today that since Seth has not shown much progress, they have to cut down the time they spend with him. The neurosurgeon that worked with us in California explained that the brain heals very gradually (if at all), and at any time can plateau. We are still clinging to Psalm 27:13-14; *I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.*

~Mary

**March 6, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 203) The daffodils and crocuses are popping up all over and the flowering plum trees are blooming. We enjoy a serenade every night from the frogs that have emerged from their winter sleep by the pond across the street. Spring is definitely in the air and it's a weird feeling, weird because this is the first time in my life that I haven't anxiously awaited this time of year where I usually breathe a sigh of relief for having made it through another soggy Seattle winter. When I analyze why spring doesn't bring the usual excitement to my heart, my reasoning goes like this: Seth's accident occurred in August, we finished off the summer with him in a coma, the fall passed, and then the winter, and now spring is nearly upon us. Soon a year will have transpired. I remember thinking on day 100, *I wonder what we'll be doing on day 200?* and the answer is, unfortunately, not much different. From the very first week, the neurologist told us that with closed head injuries like Seth's, 40% don't survive at all, 40% remain vegetative (where Seth currently is listed), 10% come out of the coma but have varying degrees of mental and physical disabilities, and only 10% return to "normal." The longer the time goes by, the greater the odds become that neither he nor we will move out of the situation we've been in. One of our girls echoed all of our thoughts last night when she said, "I'm so weary of sadness. Will our family ever be normal again?"We can relate to the scripture that says, *“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?”* (Psalm 13:1-2) But we also realize that no matter what the doctors or medical science predict, Seth is in the Lord's hands and the laws of science and medicine are subject to Him, not vice versa, so we continue to cry out for Him to have mercy on Seth and our family. *“Help me, O Lord, my God; save me in accordance with Your love. Let them know that it is Your hand, that You, O Lord, have done it.”* (Psalm 109:26-27)

An immediate prayer need for Seth is that he has a recurring urinary tract infection, which has caused him to require five new catheters in less than a week and a half. As his catheter plugs up, it is obvious that he is in terrible pain, and so the procedure is done once again. We are concerned that there could be damage to his urethra.

Many who read these updates have computer access to "the web," and this coming week you will be able to view Seth's new website at [www.sethesvelt.com](http://www.sethesvelt.com) which will continue to include our updates, photos, and other items of information which we'll now be able to update from our home computer. We really appreciate the vision and work that one of our church's youth, Dan Done, put into the original website.

~Mary

**March 16, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 215) Today we are at the seven month mark since Seth's accident. I began reading the New Testament to him when we entered Rainier Vista Care Center the end of October and I finished today with the last words of Revelation: *"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. AMEN."* It is only by God's *grace* being extended to me that I get out of bed each day and go to the nursing home (although some days all I want to do is pull the covers over my head and pretend life is like it was before August 16th). It is only by God's *grace* that I have the energy and stamina to physically be there about 50 hours a week. Yet, even when I am not there physically, I never leave the situation mentally or emotionally. It is the first thing I think of in the morning and the last at night, and most moments in between. And it is only by God's *grace* that I am not totally swept over by grief and despair (because of the total uncertainty of Seth's situation, the cloud of sadness does not move far from me, though). Pray for me as I battle with my thoughts and emotions about decisions that might need to be made in the future.

Although there have been only very small changes in Seth's condition the last month, we continue to look at Psalm 138:8 with hope: *"The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; Your love, O Lord, endures forever, do not abandon the work of Your hands."* The Lord has the final *AMEN*.

The urinary tract infections and catheter situation we have been concerned about have been resolved by pulling it completely. Each day holds its own set of challenges, but our overriding prayer is that the God who knit Seth together in my womb would re-knit the damaged areas of his brain and restore his reasoning, judgment, memories, and personality. What is impossible with man is possible with God.

Seth's updates can now be found on his new site at www.sethesvelt.com. Thank you for continuing to stand with us in prayer. Although we often feel like we are under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure (II Corinthians 1:8), we know that we are helped by your prayers. *"Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many."* (II Corinthians 1:11)

~Mary

**April 6, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 238) For many years I have been a collector of quotes, and as I pulled out my notebook to glance through them this morning I was amazed at how many of them related to our present situation. The first page started with, *"Much of life falls between the answers."* Wow! No kidding! We seem to have a lot of questions and very few answers as we try to think through how Seth's accident is affecting and will continue to affect our faith and our future.

As I was pondering this thought, the next quote I came upon was, *"Faith is believing in advance what only makes sense in reverse."* At age 53, I can look back at difficult situations in my life and see how God has used for good what was overwhelming and confusing at the time. But truthfully, this present crisis is beyond me, so all I can do is choose to believe that it will all make sense some day. The next quote that caught my attention was, "He is not the great ‛I Was' but the great ‛I Am.'" I am grateful that Jesus Christ "is the same yesterday and today and forever." Even though life looks like a puzzle right now, He is still unchanging, faithful, loving, sovereign and trustworthy.

A question we continually ask ourselves is, "What does God expect from us?" Are we supposed to just lightly shrug off the sadness that occurs, put on a happy face and pretend everything is good? Sorry, but that's not where we're at right now! But I was encouraged by another favorite quote*, "Our prisons can become prisms to reflect Christ."* We are definitely in a "prison" right now, and by that I mean an overwhelmingly dark and difficult situation that we have no control over nor power to remove ourselves from! One of the therapists at the facility where Seth resides commented that our family has literally impacted everyone at Rainier Vista Care Center, both the staff and residents. Although I know that she was greatly overstating it, I was encouraged that perhaps we are, in a small way, being a prism to reflect the reality of Christ in this "prison" we have been thrust into.

Another quote that is meaningful is from a novel by Randy Alcorn: *"Death is life's defining moment. It is where the final touch is put on each person's life portrait. The masterpiece is signed and the paint dries, never to be changed again. It is finished."* We are praying that God will be a God of Second Chances for Seth, that He will restore his mind as He has miraculously restored his body. But I am also reminded that none of us has any assurance of what awaits us right around the next corner, just as Seth couldn't imagine what awaited him on highway 91 in Riverside, California. He obviously had no idea when he left the restaurant to take his friend home on the night of August 16th, that that would be the last meal he would eat for at least the next eight months, and perhaps longer. He had no idea that he would not be moving back into his refurbished campus apartment at California Baptist University the next morning but would be spending most of the school year sharing a small room at a nursing care center with a 64-year-old homeless person from Seattle, who is also in a coma. It certainly never crossed his mind that in a matter of minutes his heart would stop beating as he lay on the side of a dirt embankment, not breathing, fighting for his life. Our situation is a constant reminder that each day must be lived for God's glory because at any point we could be called to stand before Him to give an account of our life.

Seth has not made any significant advances in the last few weeks, although several people have commented that his eyes are becoming more focused as you talk to him. Our time is stretched to the max as we continue to spend 12-14 hours every day, 7 days a week with him, doing physical therapy of all kinds plus lots of touch and talk. It is easy to get tired and discouraged as we look at him hour after hour, day after day, without knowing if he understands anything or everything or something in between. Please continue to pray for our family's endurance physically, mentally and spiritually as well as Seth's recovery.

~Mary

**April 25, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 254) We had long ago planned that this week would be a special one for our family as we looked forward to traveling to Southern California to be with Seth since he was scheduled to graduate from Cal Baptist University in April of 2004. But it was not to be. He has now spent the entire school year in hospitals and a nursing care facility. Instead of seeing him smiling in a cap and gown, we daily watch over him as he lies silently in bed in a hospital gown, and have heard the term "persistent vegetative" mentioned as well as "semi-comatose". One of the reasons for this new terminology is because of the length of time that has transpired without seeing much change in Seth's responses. Medically speaking, the longer he remains as he is, the more hopeless the situation becomes. At different periods of the day his eyes seem to be focused and alert, although he cannot make any consistent responses. So often he looks like he could just say, "Hey, what's up?" and jump out of bed, but of course he doesn't. Because of this, the therapist thinks that perhaps he understands some of what is happening around him (and maybe more), but the part of his brain that would allow him to respond has been damaged. All of this just brings us back to where we started over eight long months ago: God, who is not confined by time or circumstances, is just as much in control now as He was then. We continue to hope that His purposes for Seth would be carried out for His glory: "*The LORD will fulfill His purpose for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever; do not abandon the works of Your hands.*" (Psalm 138:8)

One step forward for Seth physically is that, since he has done well with his trache "capped over" for two weeks now, he will probably have it completely removed from his throat this week, which should make normal breathing a little easier. The respiratory staff considers this a small milestone for Seth.

Early last Sunday morning, when I was in Seth's room getting him groomed and ready for the day, a new nurse came in to do some procedures. When he learned that Seth had played the guitar, he mentioned he did, too, and started sharing about the bands he had played with. I had prayed for some special encouragement for the day, but I would have never expected that it was about to come from the man standing across the bed from me. Out of the blue he said, "Want to know what my favorite Bible verse is? It's in Job, where he says, *‛Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him' "* (Job 13:15). And then, just as quickly, he went back about his work.

This unexpected encouragement also got me thinking about a principle from the same book of the Bible. Scripture seems to indicate that Job's life (like yours and mine) is on display for the whole arena of the spiritual world to observe and see what true faith looks like. Each time we make a decision on how to respond to any difficulty, there are two unseen kingdoms watching, one pushing us to defiantly shake our fist at God because of the bad deal He's given us, and the other gently reminding us that He is our hope and strong rock of refuge. I wonder if Psalm 16:3, which we read minutes after we heard about Seth's accident, would apply here? *"As for the saints in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all My delight."* We are feeble spirits wrapped in flesh and can easily become discouraged, but our hope is that our responses would bring delight to the Lord.

Your prayers and notes of encouragement continue to sustain us. Thank you!

~Mary

**May 12, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 271) When Seth was a toddler, I remember piously telling another mother that MY son was never going to play with weapons! But I found out that God put a desire, even in little boys, to be the protector, because a stick became a gun, then he graduated to nailing a clothespin onto the stick to make a rubber band gun. And then, among other things, there were the sling shots, plastic swords and rubber tipped bow and arrows! I can still picture how carefully Seth would aim an arrow and how intently his little fingers would struggle to pull the string of the bow back so that the arrow would travel right to the intended target. We were encouraged by a similar word picture this week from Oswald Chamber's devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, describing God's activity in a believer's life. He reflects that "a saint's life is in the hands of God like a bow and arrow in the hands of an archer. God is aiming at something (we) cannot see, and He stretches and strains, and every now and again the saint says ‘I cannot stand anymore.’ God does not heed, He goes on stretching until His purpose is in sight, then He lets fly."

I wish God's purpose for Seth and our family was within our understanding at this point, but we are instructed to walk by faith, not by sight. Because Seth has made so little progress over the last months, we fully realize that aside from God's gracious intervention, this could be as good as he ever gets and pain and sorrow will forever be mixed with whatever other blessings we may enjoy in the future. Belief in the providence of God is a two-edged sword: we are sustained by the relative comfort of knowing that there is a plan and purpose for everything we are going through, and that God will bring good out of it (Romans 8:28), while at the same time we are confounded as to why God did not either lessen the severity of the accident or just take Seth home to heaven rather than possibly leaving him in a semi-comatose/persistent vegetative condition. Please pray for our continued patience and endurance.

Seth's trache tube was removed a few weeks ago, so he is truly breathing on his own without any artificial assistance. We were amazed at how quickly the hole in his neck healed over–within a day–although he will always have a noticeable characteristic depression and scar in that area. Adjusting to breathing entirely on his own is not so easy; he often snores while breathing through his upper airway and we are working to help him learn to keep his tongue lower in his mouth. The apparent anxiety this snoring creates distracts him enough so that his movements have otherwise been lessened during the past weeks.

Seth recently had a CAT scan of his lower head and neck to determine if the bone that was fractured and broken off during his accident had mended by itself. Unfortunately, it has not done so, and we will continue to have to be on the watch to be sure everyone moves him carefully. We are considering having the fracture surgically repaired, which involves a delicate operation, but is perhaps worth eliminating the worry about someone moving his neck and causing permanent spinal damage.

We are continually uplifted by your prayers, notes and e-mails.

~Mary

**May 27, 2004**

**A Father’s Perspective**

(Day 284)On the chest of drawers in Seth’s room at the nursing care center is a flip stand of photos of Seth, his friends, and family. One of my favorites is a picture of Seth sitting in his grandfather’s living room in a characteristic pose with his right leg bent under him, glancing over at his grandfather, who is relaxed in another chair and is conversing with him. Seth was as proud of his grandpa as his grandpa was of him.

My dad was born in a two-room log cabin in northeastern Washington, had fought with the navy in the South Pacific during WWII, and had retired 15 years ago after being the president of Columbia Basin College in Pasco, Washington. He had been struggling with pulmonary fibrosis, a disease that gradually reduces the lungs ability to transfer oxygen to the body, and so last June we flew Seth home from California for several days so that he could drive across the state and have some quality time with his grandfather. Originally given only a year or so to live after his diagnosis, Dad surprised everyone and lasted two and a half years. He passed away a couple of weeks ago. Our hope and prayers had been that God would restore Seth soon enough to say goodbye to his grandfather, so that he could die without being burdened by the uncertainty of Seth’s outcome, but that was apparently not meant to be. Should the Lord in His grace restore Seth, the fact that he was not around for his grandfather’s last nine months will undoubtedly be a major disappointment. And it seems that I have lost the two most important men in my life, my son and my dad, during that time.

We consulted with Seth’s doctor yesterday about the small piece of broken bone at the base of his skull that evidently has not reattached by itself. It protrudes into the hole at the base of the skull that houses his spinal cord and brain stem, and that is the reason we must use the utmost care when moving him. The doctor thinks it is possible that the piece has become “fixed” in place and may no longer be a threat, but we are planning to have Seth transferred to Harborview hospital in Seattle to have a neurosurgeon give us an expert’s opinion. If the bone piece is not fixed, surgery is an option, but such surgery would be quite delicate and not without risks. One way or other, we want to know, and it would be a relief not to worry about him being moved.

That this bone fragment was discovered at all was (from a human point of view) a fluke, a chance x-ray taken from an unusual camera angle spotted by an alert neurosurgeon in California. We often wonder, in light of Seth’s current condition: Why the chance discovery of this potentially dangerous bone fragment? Or, why the immediate covering of prayer at the accident site by a teacher from Seth’s school, or the persistent prayers of a hospital security guard that night when some of those attending Seth in the emergency room were ready to give up on him? Why the amazing turn-around of his deteriorating lung a week after his injuries, or the restart of his kidneys after having shut down? Why the “miscommunications” that resulted in Seth being inadvertently covered by two major medical insurance companies besides his school insurance? Why these (and other) evidences of God’s involvement if Seth is only to waste away in a semi-vegetative state the rest of his life? Or, is there greater glory of God yet to be seen? Perplexing as all of this is, we are instructed to “trust in the LORD with all our hearts and not to lean on our own understanding” (Prov. 3:5). That is not an easy thing, but He has not provided us with other options! *“Let the morning bring (us) word of your unfailing love, for (we) have put our trust in you”* (Psm 143:8).

~Craig and family

**June 19, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

Twenty years ago, when I was pregnant with Kirsten, I developed rheumatoid arthritis. It came on so hard and so quickly that the doctor misdiagnosed the symptoms and told me that with the disease he thought I had, I probably only had five years left to live! Although that was proven wrong, after Kirsten was born I experienced five months of debilitating pain that almost completely paralyzed me. I couldn't dress or undress myself, pick up or change my new baby's diapers, or even adjust my sheets at nighttime if they slid off. Then the disease took a corner, turning into seven years of nonstop joint aching, like I had the flu. After that, the arthritis followed another path and for the next seven years it attacked one joint at a time until the joint was destroyed. After three total joint replacements and four hand surgeries, my body seemed to settle down to a more manageable level. During that time of crisis, I had chosen II Corinthians 12:9 as a verse describing my situation: *“But He said to me,* *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* And He was sufficient.

About the time I turned 45, I decided I was at a good “half-way point” to reevaluated my life and what I wanted the second half to be characterized by. I seemed to be led to Psalm 92:12-15: *“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon, planted in the house of the Lord; they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, ‘The Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him.’”* We had earlier done a study in our home school with the kids about palm trees, and were fascinated to learn that because of the way a palm tree grows (individual growth discs that keep making the tree taller instead of wider and are filled with elastic-like fibers) the tree is flexible enough that it can withstand hurricane-force winds. Even though it might be bent flat to the ground, it cannot be broken, but just slowly springs back. Also, palm trees are anchored securely in the ground by a root system that goes out in all directions, so they cannot be uprooted, no matter how terrible the storm. This root system is so deep that it can find water, even during times of drought, and is one of the few trees that can survive in the Sahara Desert.

When I was in southern California the first five weeks after Seth’s accident, every direction I looked I saw palm trees—every size and shape imaginable, and the information we had learned so many years before came back to me now in the form of a living lesson. Although I had chosen these verses eight years before the crisis we are now facing, they have given me the continuing assurance to know that even though a storm of hurricane force is blowing against us now and we are bent, we will not be broken. Hopefully, at some point, our life will gradually turn right side up again, despite the fact that our faith is pretty shaken by the direct hit it has taken. I am grateful that I have had several decades to dig my roots deep into God's word, so that even as we walk through this desert there are sources of living water to refresh us.

At this point, Seth is still not making any progress and actually has seemed to have regressed so far as making movements with his hands and feet. We wonder if it's possible that he may have had some small but hampering strokes or seizures during the night when no one is there to notice. We remember that from the very first week, the neurologist told us that with brain trauma like Seth's, 40% die, 40% remain, to some degree, vegetative (where Seth currently is), 10% recover with some disabilities and 10% recover fully. The more time that passes, the less hopeful the situation becomes. As far as therapy goes, Seth is receiving some electric treatments this month on his face which stimulate the muscles to twitch and then fatigue, and after multiple repeats, to eventually strengthen them. Hopefully this will aid his ability to swallow and make noises. We are still waiting to hear from a hospital in Seattle to set up an appointment to evaluate the bone chip in his neck.

One of the therapists mentioned this past week that Seth seems different than other mostly unresponsive, semi-comatose patients she is familiar with because he has more facial expression, especially in his eyes. She likened him to a "young bird still encased in a shell; the rest of us discern there are signs of life within the shell and we are hoping and waiting for its beak to break through the shell and begin the process of coming out." This was encouraging to us. But she went on to add that, "Seth really needs to make this kind of “quantum leap." Please pray for this with us.

~Mary

**July 1, 2004**

Perhaps the greatest source of encouragement our family has received during the months since Seth’s accident last August has been (and continues to be) the cards, notes, and e-mails from friends, relatives, and even those whom we’ve never met personally letting us know that so many are thinking of us and praying for us and especially for Seth. We read many of these to Seth, for from the very beginning of his ordeal we have taken the position that he can understand what he hears going on around him. His responses to commands, although still few and inconsistent, and his demonstrating emotions on a number of occasions when such a response would seem appropriate have encouraged us along that line. Even one of his therapists offered that she believes there is more going on inside of his head than can be determined from his outward physical responses.

Seth will turn 24 years old on July 11th. What kind of birthday present can one give a young person who is semi-comatose, or how can one honestly say “Happy Birthday” under such circumstances? We have an idea! We know that these “Updates on Seth” are read by many friends of the family, friends of Seth, relatives, and many others whom we are not personally acquainted with who receive the updates as being forwarded from those who do know us. We think that it would be tremendously encouraging to Seth if he were to receive birthday cards, notes, or e-mails from all of you out there wishing him well or letting him know that he is being prayed for. I think we (and he) would be surprised at actually how many people are rooting for him!

So, please, if you regularly receive the updates, or even if you only occasionally visit the web site to check up on him, take a few moments to write a card at the address below or send a quick e-mail to let Seth know that you are thinking of him or praying for him, even if you have never written before. Let him know not only who you are but how you know about him (especially if you are not a personal acquaintance of the family) and where you live. If you know of other friends who may not get the updates but are following his progress, please encourage them to write as well (the greater the response, the greater his spirit will be lifted!). His 24th birthday may not be a “happy” one, but it can certainly be a blessed one. We will include these in a notebook and read them all to him on his birthday, and will undoubtedly revisit them in the future. And thanks again for your support!

The Esvelt family
18845 SE 213th St.
Renton, WA 98058

**July 17, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 334) What do you get a starving college student for his 23rd birthday? Well, FOOD of course, to supplement his diet of monster $2 burritos purchased at his favorite "Mom and Pop" joint half way between California Baptist University and his job at Home Depot! So last year, besides a huge care package of granola bars, boxed casserole mixes and cookies, we included coupons for McDonald’s, Carl Jr’s, Coldstone Creamery and Red Robin. A year later we wonder, what do you get for the same precious 24-year old son who has lain in bed in a semi-comatose state for 11 months while being fed a liquid diet through a stomach tube? Thanks to the response of many people, he received bundles of birthday greetings in the form of cards and e-mails from folks as close as next door and as far north as Alaska and Saskatchewan, as far east as Maryland, as far south as Texas and as far west as Japan. We were humbled by the outpouring of love as our family sat around Seth's bed and for three hours took turns reading prayers and encouragements from his friends, our friends and friends we didn't know we had. Sometimes a comment would tickle the girls and they would laugh so hard they'd cry. At other times, the one reading a note might get so choked up that the card would have to be passed to someone else to finish. One dear lady from Oregon shared an especially poignant quote from someone named Ione Lyall, entitled "Hold My Hand," which turned our thoughts back to the night of August 16: "Lord, You understand! You heard the crash like sudden doom; You saw the fear-dilated eyes of my soul survey the ground where lay the gloom-wrapped pieces of my hopes, shattered in less time than it could take a second hand to round the dial. Lord, you know the agony of a broken heart, and so, dear Lord, please hold my hand."

Much of the time we just sat in awe at all the people whom God has burdened to pray for Seth and for the rest of us; even a number of churches around the country lift up his name in prayer each week! I could never have imagined late last summer, when I began to send out e-mail updates to some friends from my hotel room in Riverside, how vast a base of concern and prayer would ultimately result! This far-reaching (and apparently, growing) network of intercession is a cause of encouragement and hope for us who continue to sit by his bedside.

We put all the cards and letters in a notebook and will continue to reread them to Seth in days and weeks to come. How did Seth respond to all this? Although his eyes were open the whole time and he looked alert, we still receive very little feedback. And maybe that's the hardest part, not knowing his level of understanding. Does he understand everything or nothing or something in between? So our family and some friends, taking turns, still continue to spend 12 hours a day with him.

Thanks so much for all of you who sent birthday greetings; they certainly made for a birthday we will never forget, and will continue to be a source of inspiration. And thanks for the continued prayers and encouragement. *"As for the saints in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight"* (Psalm 16:3).

~Mary

**August 2, 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

(Day 351) It's interesting how words spoken years before come back to you at a later date with a new meaning and deeper understanding attached to them. When the kids were growing up and used to have the typical sibling spats, my comment to them would be, "Is this going to matter in eternity? Then it's not worth making a deal over now."

With the difficult season our family has been going through for almost 12 months now, it causes me to reflect on how ridiculous some of the things were that seemed so important a year ago as I view life with more of an eternal perspective. For instance, I can easily recall how "bugged" I was over the lawn in the backyard. Because we all love gardening, we like to think that the rest of the yard looks like a mini Butchart Gardens. But with the help of moles, an already uneven yard kept getting bumpier every year until last year in frustration I loudly complained, "I'm 53 years old! Why can't I have a flat, smooth yard?!" (P.S. - It has since been corrected and looks great.) Shortly after that was Seth's accident and the lumpy grass took on a totally insignificant perspective as we were involved in almost daily life and death struggles and decisions.

In the room next to Seth's at Rainier Vista Care Center lies a pastor whom, interestingly enough, attended seminary with Craig in the 80's. As I was talking one evening with his wife, she summed up in words what I was feeling. She said that as people now occasionally approach her for counseling, she asks them, "Does this involve a life or death situation?" So often, she realizes, their problem stems from their own sin and selfishness, or wounded pride, and she presently has little patience dealing with such things. Ouch! So be forewarned, if you're looking for someone who oozes sympathy, I might not be the one to talk to right now! I recognize how easy it is to get sidetracked in life with minor issues and forget that we are just sojourners on earth as expressed in the words of an old southern hymn, "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through . . ." It causes me to ask myself the hard question, "Is what I'm living for worth Christ dying for?"

Someone commented recently that they wish we would report a few more positive things happening with Seth instead of just, "No, nothing new, no change." Well, reality is that that's still the answer. He has perhaps made a few gains in being better able to swallow ice chips or small bites of ice cream. On the other hand, he experienced another seizure last week, and the dosage of his medicine had to be increased. The therapy they had started up again about six weeks ago has been discontinued, although we try to duplicate as much of it on our own as we can. We are considering bringing him home, but that will require a lot of time to look into and some (more) major adjustments should we decide to do so.

Psalm 40:1-3 stood out to me this week as I prayed for Seth: *"I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."* Although the situation has always looked dismal through human eyes, we continue to cry out to the Lord to have mercy on Seth and our family and raise him up with a new and powerful "song" in his mouth that would cause many to trust in the Lord.

~Mary

**August 16th, 2004**

One full year has now passed from the evening of August 16, 2003, the night of Seth’s accident, and a night that would forever change our lives and for which a final chapter has yet to be written. To say this has been the most difficult year for our family would be a major understatement and we thank our Lord for the support we have received from God’s people: the provisions, the prayer support, and encouragement.

It continually amazes us that so many who have written and continue to pray for Seth have never even personally known him. We wish each of you could have known him; as his mother and father, we naturally love our son and were proud of him in many ways, and any attempt by us to describe him to you would, of course, be biased. A real blessing to us this past year has been hearing from those who knew him during his year at college in southern California, for they have painted for us a picture of our dear son that we weren’t able to see, living so far away. We thought we would share some of these glimpses of Seth with all of you; I think you will see that he was a real likable “people person.”

One of his professors wrote, “We pray for your courage, strength, and determined purpose to get this guy well! I would so enjoy having Seth back in my classes someday. I still have vivid memories of discussions we have had, in class and outside of class. Seth has a will and determination that is beyond his years. When I told you in the hospital that I believed that Seth was really maturing and becoming a godly man, I meant it. He is so inquisitive about how the Lord fashioned us and how He designed us to help others. I hope that you understand that Seth did show Jesus to a lot of people around here. I will say this once more, you raised a godly son, you gave him wonderful instruction, he has matured and Seth has, is, and will be used by God in the future. Thanks for sharing this guy with us for a short time. But eventually I want him back in my class. Okay?”

A roommate shared this: “. . Seth has already made such a difference. He forever changed me in more ways than I can describe. God used him so much in my life as well as the other lives he touched while attending CBU. I don’t know how my life could be the way it is if it were not for Seth. Seth was like a brother to me, and although we didn’t see eye to eye on everything I learned so much about life and truly about living a good life. I continue to pray for your entire family daily and pray for the best out of this situation. God bless you for raising such a wonderful son, and loving friend and brother to me.”

A classmate of Seth’s wrote recently, “. . . I cannot imagine what you and your family are going through, but I can tell you how blessed I am to have known your son for the short time I knew him and I can say thank you for raising such a wonderful man of God who had the integrity to see beyond people’s physical appearance and see individual’s hearts. He was one of the few . . . who showed the love of God.”

One of the managers at Home Depot, where Seth worked, offered his impression: “I travel the same freeway each and every day I go to work and pass the area where the accident happened, and each time I think of what happened and say a huge prayer for him, and hope that someday soon he will be able to talk to all of us and make us laugh like he did every day I worked with him. I really enjoyed working with Seth; every day he brought a smile to the entire store, and one day I know he will again.”

Of course, we also heard about his being reprimanded for the food fight in the cafeteria, and the practical jokes with his roommates. As his parents, we of all people know that Seth wasn’t perfect, but we were proud of the man he was becoming and we miss that Seth terribly. Our desire has always been that our children would live such lives that God would be glorified to the fullest extent. *“The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever; do not abandon the works of Your hands.”* (Psalm 138:8)

Tomorrow Seth will be taken up to Seattle, to Harborview Medical Center, where x-rays and a CAT scan will be done to determine the status of the bone fragment at the base of his skull, broken off during the accident and which has never reattached. A neurosurgeon will advise us a couple of weeks later. Please pray that this fragment will be shown to be stabilized and that no surgery would be required since it is in a most delicate place, near his brain stem.

~Craig and Mary

**September 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

I hear the question dozens of times every day, whether at the grocery store, the sandwich shop, the espresso stand, or from people at Seth's nursing care center . . . "Hi! How are you?" It's a typical American greeting and you're expected to reply in a chipper voice, "Fine! How are you?" There are also those who inquire from hearts deeply concerned for us, but it's still a hard question to answer. Do they mean, how am I doing physically, how am I doing emotionally, or how am I doing spiritually? There can be a lot more loaded in a response to that little greeting than a person originally bargains for!

Physically, being with Seth at the various hospitals and then the care center for 340 days out of the past year has taken it's toll on my body. Some days I am fairly functional, but because of my rheumatoid arthritis, there are other days when I'm in quite a bit of pain. I continue to learn the lesson of persevering with grace and humility.

Emotionally, because I am daily immersed in the crushing heartache of Seth's condition, I am still fragile. I realize that there is much of the story still to unfold, but without knowing the ending it seems like we've been stuck in a very dark chapter for an awfully long time. Some days I am able to walk through the responsibilities required of me and come out intact at the end. But there are other times, as I sit for hours on end with Seth, watching his eyes which often seem fairly alert and focused even though his body makes no response, that I wonder how I can endure another moment. I continue to learn the lesson of patience and appropriating God's grace given for the difficulties of that day.

Spiritually, there are days I feel like I am clinging tightly to the Solid Rock of Christ, our only hope, but at other times I feel like God has abandoned us, removing all traces of His presence. But He gives me a living lesson of truth each time I drive to the nursing care center. On a clear day, as you turn south onto Highway 167 toward Puyallup, you can be treated to a spectacular, breathtaking view of majestic Mt. Rainier. It's there . . . solid, unchanging and strong. But on many days in this Puget Sound region, clouds either partially or totally cover the view. Yesterday, from my perspective, it looked like the mountain had been completely removed! But, of course, it was there, and God reminded me that His deepest work of faith is not done in my emotions and feelings but in my spirit, as I know that His character, which is trustworthy and compassionate, is also unchanging. *"Never doubt in the darkness what you've come to believe in the light.”*

On August 15th, Craig used the Sunday morning church service to give our congregation an update on how we are doing a year after the accident. It was a compilation and evaluation of our thoughts, hopes and prayers. If you would like a tape or CD of his message, which more thoroughly answers the question, "Hi! How are you?" drop us an e-mail ( with your name, address and audio preference and we'd be glad to send it to you.

We finally heard back from the neurosurgeon who has studied some recent x-rays and a CAT scan of the broken chip of bone in the back of Seth's neck, near the brain stem. The doctor is fairly confident that the bone piece has been stabilized and is even providing some support, but he wants to look at some of the other pictures taken by previous doctors as a comparison before he makes a final judgment. It would be a relief to not have to be quite so careful with Seth's neck each time we move him. Also, a recent change in his seizure medication has seemed to allow him to be more alert for longer periods of time.

Once again, we deeply appreciate your prayers and encouraging letters and e-mails.

~Mary

**October 2004**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

I believe that God is always carefully weaving His perfect plans into our lives even through all the difficulties and heartbreaks. During our first five weeks in the ICU in Riverside, all I wanted to do was get back to the security of home, but we kept running into obstacles in being able to move Seth. Finally, there was a small window of opportunity when he was medically stable enough to be flown to the Northwest and a doctor at Overlake Hospital in Bellevue, after reviewing the files for six days, agreed to accept Seth as his patient. The medical flight was lined up, but the evening before we were to leave the doctor called and said that he had reconsidered and decided not to take Seth, since he was concerned about the unstable bone chip in his neck. My heart sank as we started trying to line up another hospital in the area that would accept him as a patient. Our next attempt was Harborview in Seattle, which is the main trauma center for the Northwest. But they also turned him down due to lack of space. Meanwhile, after an emergency surgery for an infected mass in his abdomen, we had another small window to fly him up here, and Swedish Medical Center in Seattle agreed to take him. The flight was successful and Seth was put in ICU on the 7th floor.

At Swedish there was an interesting display case to your right as you got off the elevator. It had seven objects in it and said that seven was, to many, a special number. It alluded to the fact that for Christians, seven was thought to be the number representing God. We just *knew* that something really special would happen in room 745. And it did. One of Seth's evening nurses was Matthew, whose special interest and expertise was in neurology. We were always glad when he was assigned to our room, because we felt especially confident leaving Seth in his care. This was not just a job to Matthew, for he demonstrated compassion for his patients as well as their families. We could tell he had a passion to help others. Holly often took the "evening shift" for our family at the hospital, so as she sat by Seth's side, and as Matthew cared for Seth they spent hours talking and sharing about life and spiritual issues (I'm sure Seth got particularly excellent care on those evenings with all the extra attention!). Now, 12 months later and on Holly's birthday, Matthew has asked Holly to marry him. We have prayed since she was born for the special life partner that God would bring to her and that together they would be used to further God's kingdom in ways that neither of them could accomplish separately. God has more than abundantly answered that prayer in Matthew. We are looking forward to a spring wedding. They plan on playing a recording of a wedding song Seth composed for a friend (but was not able to perform due to the accident) at their ceremony. This song, incidentally, can be downloaded from Seth's web site. Of course, we imagine how much more wonderful it would be for God to miraculously raise Seth up to be able to do it in person! (Psalm 126:1-3: *"When the Lord restored the fortunes of (His people), we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, ‛The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."*)

Unfortunately, at this time Seth still remains the same as he has for the past six months, often seeming fairly alert, but unable to respond. His overall muscle tone is excellent despite being bed-ridden or in a wheelchair for 14 months. The report from the neurosurgeon at Harborview regarding the bone chip in his neck stated that he thought the fragment was stabilized, but he is waiting for previous photos to be sent from Riverside Community Hospital and Swedish hospital for comparison before he will make a definite prognosis. As always, we appreciate your prayers and encouragements. There are still some cassette tapes and CDs of Craig's "Reflections of a Parent's Heart" message from August 15th. If any of you are interested, let us know.

~Mary

**November 2004**

**A Father's Perspective**

I imagine most of us enjoy hearing stories which highlight what we might call "the indomitable human spirit" or of a desperate individual's "will to live," whether that refers to struggling to survive against hopeless odds in a mountain blizzard or on an emergency room table. I recall a father's pride and hope welling up within me when a tall, tattooed medical technician, several days after Seth's accident, recounted for us how frankly amazed everyone in the emergency room was at the fact that Seth's heart continued to beat on and on despite the lack of oxygen getting to his organs because of his torn lungs. "We thought it would have given out on him hours earlier, and we had decided not even to try to resuscitate him by electric shock if it stopped, but it just kept on going! I could see that he was a fighter." The emergency room doctor who returned to the hospital later in the morning was stunned to see that he had lasted through the night. Not many days later, while Seth was deep in a coma, the pulmonary doctor told us that Seth was trying to override the unnatural cadence of the breathing machine with his own natural rhythm. Again came the stirring of pride and hope, and the whispered words in his ear, "Keep fighting, son!" That will to live, that indomitable spirit . . . but is it enough?

Today I lean over the bed close to his handsome face and command, "Seth, look at me!" His darting eyes suddenly shift and lock onto mine for a moment, then wander off again. I wonder if the Seth I knew as a beloved son is still "in there," or if that Seth departed alongside Highway 91 fifteen months ago and I am now looking into the face of a different person. Hope and faith cling to the former and reason resigns itself to the latter. Which will prevail? Some folks encourage us to "keep the faith" for a mighty work of God while other well-intentioned individuals cryptically suggest we "move on with our lives." We appreciate their concerns and understand their different points of view but, of course, they are on the outside looking in, and in either case, it is not so easy. Much of our hope was originally in the natural, i.e., in Seth's own vitality and his body's ability to recoup (along with a lot of prayer for the Lord's help, to be sure), but those hopes waned and died over the months and have now been replaced with purely a "last stand hope" in a supernatural act of God's direct healing. Yet, without knowing the mind of God, how long does one hold on to that kind of hope? The Scripture tells us, *"Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him"* (Isa. 64:4). And so we continue to wait upon our faithful Lord; for exactly what, we're not sure.

As you remember Seth in your prayers, please remember Mary as well. She will be having a total knee replacement at the end of the month (her second knee replacement, and fourth joint replacement overall due to her rheumatoid arthritis). She will have to be off her arthritis medication for a month, and will be using a walker, then a cane, during her recovery. Needless to say, this will hinder her ability to help with Seth.

~Craig

**December 31, 2004 (16 ½ months)**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

This New Year's Eve Craig and I will do like we have done at every other end of the year before we go to bed. We'll evaluate what has happened the past year and ponder what might be ahead as we pray for God's grace to guide and sustain us.

Several weeks ago, as I got out my Bible to read as I have almost every day for three decades, I asked the Lord to give me a special encouragement from His Word. It has been so long without any changes in Seth's condition, and we realize that without a supernatural intervention by the Lord, there is no hope for his recovery. Although small in comparison, my knee replacement and slow recovery with continuing pain adds another difficulty to the equation. But my attention was grabbed when my Bible turned open to Isaiah 61 which was entitled, "The Year of the Lord's Favor." How my spirit yearns for a season of rest from emotional grieving and physical exhaustion! Verse one begins by saying, *“He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted . . . to comfort those who mourn”* (this describes us) . . . *“and release from darkness for the prisoners”* (a pretty accurate description of what it must be like to be in a condition like Seth's).

Verse three is a familiar portion of scripture to me, but I read it with new hope . . . *“To bestow on them a crown of* ***beauty*** *instead of* ***ashes,*** *the oil of* ***joy*** *instead of* ***mourning,*** *the garment of* ***praise*** *for the* ***spirit of despair****.”* This seems to be something God does, not something we have to work up or accomplish in our own strength. And the verse finishes up by saying that *“it is for the display of His splendor.”* All we have ever desired for our lives and our children's lives is for God to be glorified through our actions, attitudes and words.

Verse four shocked me as I realized that it was essentially a restatement of Seth's life verse from Isaiah 58:12.

Verse nine ends by saying, *“All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.”* I know that there are many ways that God's blessings might be manifest, but I also know we have some very specific needs and prayers in our family. Since that day, I have read Isaiah 61 daily . . . maybe I'll do it for the whole year because of the hope and comfort it brings to my soul.

A highlight on Christmas Day was that we brought Seth home for the afternoon after borrowing a van with wheelchair capability. It was a bittersweet time of having all of our family together at home after over 16 months. When we first wheeled him into the living room he began making some unusual noises. Was he trying to communicate? It was really difficult to take him back to the care center that evening, and we are continuing to weigh the pros and cons of bringing him home on a permanent basis. We still have no definitive word about the bone chip in his neck; in fact, the surgeon who had Seth's files for several months moved to another state without really getting back to us, so now another doctor will be reviewing his case! Other than that, there is nothing new on the horizon. It all ends at Psalm 46:10, *“Be still and know that I am God.”*

~Mary