**February 2005**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

As I was going through my files this week, I came across a folder listed, “Seth's School Papers.” It was pleasant reliving the memories that reading over his papers brought. I laughed as he talked about the fun ski trips he took with his friends and his recollections of our vacations to Twin Lakes, when his grandmother would greet us at the cabin with a hearty meal after a day of fishing. I could almost hear the blend of voices when he wrote about his young men's quintet that sang at a nursing home each month. I was proud of him when he shared about the five weeks he spent at a ministry in Oklahoma, at his own expense, helping to build a counseling center for young people. It brought a smile to my face to read about how he spent 16 hours stacking our wood pile to test his diligence! One paper was called, "What's More Contagious than the Flu?" and talked about the importance of being enthusiastic (which he was), no matter what you're doing. A paper that especially caught my attention was one that he wrote when he was 15 containing a part of his personal spiritual journey, which I'd like to share with you.

"From the time I was young, I was taught biblical principles that I tried to apply to my life. I learned that the most important thing is for a person to be in right relationship with God, our Creator (Psalm 24:1 - *"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it"*). When I was 11 years old, I realized that my sin was separating me from knowing God in a personal way (Romans 3:23 - *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"*)*,* but that Christ paid for my sins on the cross (Romans 5:8). I also knew I couldn't work my way to heaven because I couldn't keep all the principles I had learned (Ephesians 2:8-9). It was plain that I couldn't live the life God marked out for me on my own, and I knew I had to let God take control of my life. After I did that, I felt free. There was now enjoyment in reading the Bible and praying. I know that I am still not perfect, but now I am concerned about what God wants me to do. I realize that if I am fully committed to Him, He will use me for His purposes and really make my life count."

As I read Seth's closing statement, I couldn't help thinking about Psalm 138:7-8 (*"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. . . The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever; do not abandon the works of your hands."*) and praying that this verse will be true in his life. I was encouraged this week as I read a section of a book by Joni Eareckson Tada, herself a quadriplegic, about people who were in a coma or persistent vegetative state like Seth. She reiterates the fact that, "the Spirit of God is able to work dramatically in the spirit of such a person, perhaps more so than at any other time of their life. It may appear that nothing is taking place in the life of a man or woman in this state, but remember that the work of God is a spiritual activity, very often separate from a person's intellect or even basic brain activity. I know that many of these people have come out of their sleep having connected with God in an extraordinary way."

Seth's condition hasn't changed; he has periods of sleeping and wakefulness, and on occasions he responds to simple commands to move his hand, foot, or head. We continue to do physical therapy to keep his limbs and joints flexible, and his overall muscle tone is surprisingly good despite nearly 18 months of inactivity. We are debating the merits of bringing him home later in the spring on a permanent basis, if plans to remodel part of our house prove realistic. It is remarkable to realize that our family has logged over 35,000 miles back and forth to the care center over the past year! We sincerely appreciate your continued prayers.

~Mary

**March 2005**

**A Father's perspective**

Generally the weather for this time of year in the Seattle area is fairly predictable (gray and wet). But for the normally soggy Puget Sound area, we experienced an unusually dry and beautiful spring-like February, whereas normally dry southern California, where Seth was attending college a couple of years ago, seems to have stolen our moisture. If the seasonal weather patterns are unpredictable, we have learned that life is far more so.

Two years ago at this time Mary and I had one of the most delightful weeks of our lives, having left the rains of the Seattle area to attend a pastor's conference in the Los Angeles area. We drank in the balmy weather, were treated to the sight of palm trees instead of evergreens, were spoiled by the hosting church with its extravagant hospitality, and finally enjoyed the highlight of the week on Saturday: visiting Seth at California Baptist University in nearby Riverside. It was the first time Mary had seen the beautiful campus, and Seth was excited to show us around the place and its vicinity where he was "living his dream." Life was good, predictable.

But unpredictably, one year later we were visiting a very different Seth at a very different home, a nursing care facility a half hour from our own home, clinging to small signs of movement from our formerly active son as he lay in a coma. And now, yet another year has passed. Predictably, so far as medical science is concerned, things haven't changed a whole lot. The initial high degree of hope we held for Seth's recovery has dwindled but is nevertheless a tenacious thing. Miracles do happen but, we realize, the very word implies that they are very rare occurrences.

One of the things that *is* sadly predictable in people of Seth's predicament is the gradual stiffening of joints and tendons when the body is so inactive over a long period of time. For the most part, the staff at the nursing care center has discontinued any physical therapy for Seth since he was not progressing as we had hoped, and therefore whatever therapy that is done is usually done by us. We are fighting what most of the staff probably believes is a lost cause with our regular range-of-motion exercises on Seth's legs and feet, to keep the knees bending, the heels from turning in, and the feet from "dropping." Recently we realized his big toes do not bend up anymore, so we are beginning to attempt to reclaim some of that flexibility that is so necessary for walking. Often I have to slowly break Seth's surprisingly strong grip and stretch his palm and fingers back to offset the tendency of his hands to become claw-like. At least three times a week I pull Seth into a sitting position on the edge of his bed (supporting him by kneeling behind him) and rotate his head and trunk, arch his back, and move his arms in a swimming motion. If the stretching hits his pain threshold, he lets me know by an involuntary clenching of his fist or tapping of his foot.

What's the point? Ostensibly, it is so that, should Seth providentially become one of those rare miracles, he could function like an otherwise normal person. Or, is it just the futile attempts of a couple of proud parents who just don't want to see their son wind up in the twisted, pathetic state of looking like so many others in his condition? Hope still springs eternal and, for us, hope is now in the realm of the unpredictable! *"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."* (Isa. 43:19)

~Craig

**April 2005**

 **Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

As I sit here looking into Seth’s eyes, which are focused intently on me right now, I can’t help thinking about Terri Schiavo, the brain-damaged woman who died this past week from starvation. Like her, Seth is also listed as “persistent vegetative” and is being fed through a stomach tube. Seven weeks after his accident, a neurologist advised us to consider “letting nature take its course” the next time Seth got pneumonia (a recurring ailment when he was breathing with a trache) and not to treat it. It can be easy to feel forgotten and abandoned by the Lord when disappointment and grief seem unrelenting. A quote by Elisabeth Elliot, one of my spiritual heroes , who herself suffered through many valleys, reflects, “Faith’s most severe tests come not when we see nothing, but when we see a stunning array of evidence that seems to prove our faith vain.” I learned long ago that I could not trust or live by my emotions for answers, but could only rely on the truth of God’s Word. Isaiah 49:14-16 states, “But Zion (read: the Esvelts) said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me; the Lord has forgotten me.’ Can a mother forget a baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have you engraved on the palms of my hands.” So, although Seth’s condition has not changed as we continually pray it would, God gives us glimpses into other ways that He is still intimately involved in our situation.

A recent example is that Craig and I have thought it would be beneficial for us to learn some massage techniques so that we could better help Seth’s limbs stay flexible and promote better circulation. I happened to mention this to a respiratory gal at the care center and she informed me that there was a one-day massage class at a local community college we could take. We decided to sign up for it, hoping what we learned could be transferred to Seth’s care. Meanwhile, we were able to get away for two days at a Bed and Breakfast in Port Townsend, two hours away, because of a gift from our church. The first morning, as we were walking into the dining room for breakfast, I told Craig that I sure didn’t feel like talking to anyone, but we were seated with a kind-looking couple about our age. In the course of the conversation, the husband mentioned that he had retrained five years ago for a new career—massage therapy. Craig ventured to explain about Seth and asked if he thought the class we planned to sign up for would accomplish what we hoped it would. To our amazement, we learned not only that this couple was from Puyallup (where Seth is) but that he comes to Seth’s care center (our home away from home) once a week to work with patients!! We don’t believe that it was merely coincidence that we “happened” to be at that particular Bed and Breakfast on that particular morning, sitting with that particular couple. So, this last week, Patrick graciously gave us a personal two hour session, showing us how to specifically work with Seth. When he told us there was no charge, I almost burst into tears from his kindness.

At this point, we are still proceeding with plans to bring Seth home by June. Holly is getting married in three weeks and then we will start on the construction of enlarging her present bedroom to accommodate Seth with a hospital bed, wheelchair, hydraulic lift and other things that he will require. The next two months will be very hectic trying to figure out how everything fits together. We recognize that having Seth home will be a total life change for us (even more so than the last 19 months) since it will involve a 24/7 responsibility. At the care center, we can leave at night and return in the morning refreshed and ready for a full day. We covet your prayers for wisdom, stamina and grace, while we continue to learn what it means to love and give unconditionally.

~Mary

**May 2005**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

Weddings are so much fun, especially when it’s your own daughter getting married! Seth’s older sister, Holly, was married to Matthew Rollosson on April 23rd, on the beautiful grounds of Northwest Baptist Seminary in Tacoma, Washington, the graduate school Craig attended in the 1980’s. The place was originally the estate of the Weyerhauser family, the timber barons. Craig not only escorted Holly down the aisle but officiated the ceremony as well. Holly met Matthew when Seth was his patient in the ICU at Swedish Medical Center in Seattle, where Seth was taken after we had him flown up from Riverside, California, five weeks after his accident. You will be able to read more about their love story by clicking onto ‘Matthew and Holly’s Story’ on Seth’s website (sethesvelt.com). As Holly shares, it is a testimony of how God “can arrange unlikely circumstances and bring blessing in the midst of tragedy.” Although the entire wedding was a special blessing, a particularly touching moment was the playing of Seth’s recorded song, “Lost in You,” during the lighting of the candles. It was Holly’s way of allowing Seth to still be a part of the ceremony even though he wasn’t physically there. There weren’t many dry eyes in the sanctuary after that. That song, and another song that Seth and his younger sister Kirsten shared at a church service several years ago, can be downloaded from Seth’s website. The newlyweds drove off, chauffered in a classic white Bentley, and their first stop was the Care Center to spend some special time with Seth. Afterward, Holly and Matthew graciously paraded around the lunchrooms and hallways, as the residents excitedly exclaimed, “Here comes the bride! Here comes the bride!” To the delight of everyone, they shared their wedding cake and flowers and left copies of the wedding program which contained their love story. Many of the staff, as well as the residents, were moved to tears as they read about God’s hand in bringing Mathew and Holly together.

An issue that has been of nagging concern to us ever since we found out about it the week after Seth’s accident has been a bone fragment that was broken off at the base of his skull (the right occipital condyle for you in the medical profession), a supposedly “floating” piece of bone that could pose a danger to Seth if his neck was pushed a certain way since it was in the area of his brain stem. We tried to have it checked out last summer with a trip to Seattle for x-rays and a CAT scan but received no definitive word at that time (the surgeon moved away without getting back to us). On Monday of this week, however, we borrowed a van with wheelchair capability and took Seth up to a specialist in Seattle for yet another set of x-rays and a CAT scan, and this time the doctor determined that the bone fragment had indeed reattached itself and was secure. This was good news! It means that surgery is not necessary, that we can dispense with his neck brace when we get him up and down in a wheelchair, that we can begin more intensive therapy with him without fear of harming him, and that we can move on with the remodel of our house in preparation for bringing him home. It was a long day for Seth, nearly eight hours in a wheelchair, and we asked him if he understood that he was in a clinic in Seattle. He gave us a “thumbs up” in response. Later we took a detour on the way back to the care center and stopped by our home for an hour, only the second time he has been home in nearly 21 months. We asked him that if he recognized his home, the place where he grew up, to move his toes, which he did. We continue to hope for much more, God willing.

~Mary

**June 2005**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

The other night when I was sitting with Seth the hallway was pretty quiet, so I brought out his portable CD player to share his song “Lost In You” with one of the residents who had wanted to hear it. Before the song was over, a small crowd was gathered, each whispering to the next person, “That’s Seth! That’s Seth!” Several had tears in their eyes as they said, “Now we know what HE sounds like when we say ‘Hi’ to him.” One of the nurses who had come up the hall part way through the song exclaimed in surprise afterwards, “That was Seth?” Of course, the residents and care givers at Rainier Vista only know Seth as they see him each day, i.e., immobile, mute, and mostly unresponsive. Our hearts still break because we miss seeing his contagious smile and his enjoyment of people and work and life. They only see him as he is now, but we still remember him as he was.

Because the bone chip in Seth’s neck has healed, we hired an organization called Developmental Movement to do an evaluation on him and give us some ideas for continued therapy. They recommend a rigorous schedule of “patterning” when he gets home, but at this point we move him onto his stomach on a therapy mat by using a hydraulic lift and lots of sweat. Then, kneeling on the mat with him, Craig and a therapist take turns moving his legs and arms while I stabilize his head and talk to him. Craig has actually done the entire procedure by himself which is quite a taxing feat! Often Seth will make low moans when we are working with him; whether because he’s in pain or feeling the new sensation of being on his stomach after almost 22 months, or trying to express himself, we don’t know. We have seen a few new responses, which although very small, are encouraging to the therapist.

Work has begun on the remodeling of our house, in preparation for bringing Seth home. Our goal is to have him home by his 25th birthday on July 11th. It was fitting that Seth’s first employer, who taught him residential construction, was on hand to build the forms for the foundation of Seth’s new room, a simple but solid foundation that will support the remodel. It seems strangely analogous to the foundation of our faith, a simple belief in a sovereign God Who provided a sacrifice for our sins through His son, Jesus Christ. There’s much that doesn’t make sense to us right now, nor does there seem like much to look forward to as this “remodeling” of our lives is taking shape. I can honestly say that at this point, I liked the “old room” a lot better. But our foundation has been firmly established by the Master Architect Who lovingly holds the blueprints in His hands. I relate to the definition of faith expressed by author Philip Yancy, “Faith is believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.” As the hymnist John Rippon wrote in 1787, *“How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! . . . When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow; For I will be near thee, thy troubles to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.”*

~Mary

**July 2005**

**A Father’s Perspective**

When Seth was critically injured two summers ago we faced the daunting task of moving him from Riverside, California, where he had been attending college, up to the Seattle area where we live. We were planning to take out a loan to pay for the cost of moving him the only way possible in his condition, that of chartering a special medically-equipped Lear Jet for around $12,000. However, people rallied around, and two church youth groups held car washes to raise funds. Then one of the youth in our church called a newspaper reporter and explained the situation to him, and the next thing we knew an article was on the front page of the *South King County Journal* with Seth’s story and picture on it, explaining that the family was hoping to fly him back to his home area. Unsolicited money began pouring in from churches, friends, and other individuals, and to our surprise we had the funds to fly Seth home and then some! The “then some” has been sitting in a church account for whatever needs might arise, and the generosity of so many kind people continues to bless us as we are now remodeling a room in our house, debt free, to enable us to bring Seth home from the nursing care center permanently in a couple of weeks. Although we are anxious to have him home, his care will surely present us with a new set of challenges!

People have continued to support us in many ways during our ordeal, not only by such generous expressions as those above but through their prayers and letters and e-mails of encouragement. These have meant more to us than we can express. We read some of them to Seth, especially those that are from people he knew who share memories of him and prayers. On a number of occasions, after reading such a letter, we will ask Seth if he remembers so-and-so from school, work, etc., and he will respond with a small movement of his foot or hand. It is difficult to imagine how hard it would be for a formerly active, fun-loving “people person” to be trapped in a body that cannot respond and live so isolated from the family and friends he knew and loved. Do the words of the psalmist reflect his own thoughts? *“Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.”*  (Psalm 142:7) . . . *In my anguish I cried to the Lord and he answered me by setting me free.”* (118:5)

Seth will be having his 25th birthday on July 11th, the second birthday he’s had in his stricken condition. For this reason we are again asking any of you who feel so inclined to send Seth a card or e-mail to encourage him, to let him know of your prayers and thoughts, and anything else he might be interested in hearing about. If you were not personally acquainted with Seth let him know who you are, where you’re from, and how you came to know about him. We can’t think of anything that would mean more to him now than hearing from many of you. Last year our family sat around his bed and for three hours read the birthday greetings to him! Those letters were reread many times over the following months. Thanks again for your support.

The Esvelt family

**August 1, 2005**

**A Father’s Perspective**

Driving to the nursing care center for the past 21 months has almost become a ritual. I usually stop at an Espresso stand nearby for a latte and the girl on duty inevitably asks about Seth (“Not much change, but thanks for asking”). As I pull up to Rainier Vista, I always pray that I will be an encouragement to my son, and that God would give him the wherewithal to be encouraged. Seth turned 25-years old a few weeks ago, and we were blessed and encouraged by reading to him letters and cards that friends and relatives had sent. A very special birthday present came in the form of a visit by the campus minister from California Baptist University where Seth was attending college when he was hurt. The staff at Cal Baptist had been a tremendous help to our family in those early days following the accident, and the fact that, nearly two years later, one of them would fly up to the Seattle area just to see Seth on his birthday was incredibly touching. When Guy Grimes asked Seth if he remembered him, Seth immediately moved his foot in a decisive manner.

Such responses, inconsistent though they are, are small encouragements that let us know something is going on inside his head. Whether Seth is fully aware of what is going on or only partially aware is impossible to determine, but we act on the assumption that he understands us. As I look at him and he often seems so alert that I can imagine him suddenly saying, “Hey, Dad!” and getting up from his wheelchair, I consider that to be confined inside of a body that does not respond to one’s will must be sheer misery for an individual who is so young, was so active and had so much to live for. We read the Psalms to him frequently, and whenever I come across Psalm 88 I imagine that those words may very well express exactly how Seth thinks and feels about things (read it and you will understand). How utterly pointless life would seem. Some have otherwise suggested that God could be communing with him in a special way while he is not consciously in “our world,” developing a deeper relationship with Seth. Or, are his thought processes severely limited? We can only speculate, and speculating is not nearly as satisfying as knowing.

One of the drawbacks to bringing Seth home is that he will miss the continual greetings of the nurses, aides and other staff at Rainier Vista Care Center who breeze in and out of his room. The occasional visits by friends and loved ones, albeit somewhat awkward in that the conversations are decidedly one-way, let him know that he matters. That is why we so appreciate the letters, e-mails and cards he received. They, along with personal visits must be an encouragement for someone such as Seth; just letting him know that he is thought of, prayed for, and worthy of hearing even mundane news from others are all positive assertions that he remains a person of value regardless of his inability to interact. One of his classmates provided such a strong affirmation when he wrote, “I am writing to you and not your family because I want you to know that, no matter what, I don’t see you as an invalid or not even as though you are sick but I see you as a man. I see you as a strong man of God. I have never forgotten what you did for me while we attended CBU.” A friend shared, “I miss your friendship and all the wonderful things you brought into my life.” A relative said, “Again, you gift others with your being. You have turned hope through God’s Word into an ‘anchor for my soul.” A missionary penned, “We have shared your story with our Brazilian brothers and sisters in the Lord in the national church we attend. So many Brazilian people here are praying for you, too.” Another dear overseas friend wrote, “I’m a terrible writer. I don’t even write my own mother. However, you are special because I love your parents and their journey through life. . . God desires truth in your inner man and He loves walking with the real Seth in private. We on the outside are jealous and perplexed, but we pray for the day when God will share you with us again.” There were many other words of courage given, too numerous to share in this update. Of course, being paid a special visit from one of the staff from CBU must have been a huge affirmation. After two years there are those who still care, and he is not forgotten.

We had hoped that Seth would be home for his birthday. An enlarged and beautifully remodeled room, constructed almost entirely by friends from our church, is ready and waiting for him, but paperwork from the State agencies remains to be completed. Ironically, his bittersweet homecoming may turn out to be almost exactly two years from the date of his accident. Thanks for your continued support and prayers.

~Craig

**August 23, 2005**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith . . .* (Heb. 12:1).

When Seth was first injured, the neurosurgeon at the hospital repeatedly told us that we were “in this for the long haul.” I naively thought “long haul” meant several months in the hospital followed by several months of therapy. Little did I realize the marathon that we were to begin running. A couple of weeks ago, on August 10th at 2:00 in the afternoon, we laid down the baton after finishing the first leg of the race, a 725 day marathon of daily being with Seth in three different hospitals and the nursing care facility. A number of teary-eyed residents waited with us in the lobby for our ride home. We took pictures, said final thank you’s, gave goodbye hugs to our Rainier Vista family and then headed for home, anxious to show Seth the special room that we had been able to prepare for him. As we entered the front door, we realized that we were taking up the baton for the next leg of a marathon of unknown length. I thought of the words I had read that morning from The Valley of Vision, a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions: “Until I finish my course with joy may I pursue it with diligence, in every part display the resources of the Christian.”

Seth has not given us any indication, that we are aware of, that he understands he is home. But there was an interesting incident on the night of his birthday, July 11th. After we left that evening, a couple of nursing aides who were caring for Seth told a nurse that Seth seemed to be uncharacteristically agitated. The three returned to his room and, after asking if something was bothering him (and not really expecting any particular response), he moved his foot. The surprised nurse then asked if his head hurt, and there was no response. She asked if his stomach hurt, and no response. Nor was there any response when she asked if he was uncomfortable. Then one of the aides remembered that it was his birthday, and we had been telling him for months that our goal was to have him permanently home by that time. So she asked Seth if he was upset that it was his birthday and he didn’t get to go home, and his foot immediately started moving again.

On a number of occasions friends have remarked, “It’s so great that you’re finally bringing Seth home!” And after putting over 66,000 miles on our cars, we are ready to let the dust settle a little. But we are finding that caring for our son at home is a task that involves more time than we expected; much of his routine daily care that was done at the nursing center now falls to us (regular changing of position, laundry, giving medications and monitoring the feeding tube, etc., plus the on-going therapy and grooming needs we were already taking care of), not to mention rising to the alarm clock in the middle of each night to care for him. It will be a while before we adjust to the routine, and our initial nervousness is not unlike new parents who bring a baby home from the hospital for the first time and are afraid of bungling something. But the difference is that, with an infant, you look forward to growth and maturing, to smiles and learning to walk and talk. The intensity of care diminishes. But for Seth, those are, at best, dreams of ours that cannot be so easily taken for granted. Please pray that we will be able to run with perseverance this new leg of the marathon, consistently displaying the resources that are ours as believers in Christ: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

~Mary

**October 2005**

**A Father’s Perspective**

We are approaching the two month mark in having brought Seth home to live. The upside of this decision is that Mary, myself, and Kirsten are able to see more of each other, eat meals together once again, and so once again function more as a family (sort of), whereas for the previous two years at least one of us was at the hospital or nursing care center with Seth throughout the day and evening. Besides this, we think Seth receives better overall care here at home since his needs are not competing with the needs of a number of other patients. It is true that in an emergency situation a nurse would not be so immediately present, but they or 911 are as close as a phone call.

The downside to the new living arrangement is the amount of care that is required throughout the day (and at least once in the middle of the night), and our being tied down for the long term at a time in our lives when we had always anticipated the kind of freedom usually enjoyed by “empty-nesters.” While it is true that the state pays for a sufficient number of hours of in-home care each month, so that we can both get away from the house for short periods, such hired care givers are not licensed to administer the medications that are required several times throughout a 24-hour period. So, for us to leave for just a day, let alone getting away for several days, creates some logistic complications that we have not yet even begun to address.

Seth frequently appears to be aware of what we are doing and saying around him by responding with his foot or hand to our requests, although the extent of his thought processes are unknown. Several weeks ago we took him to a local neurologist, whom we wanted to enlist for future consultations regarding medications and, after reviewing the original MRI from two years ago showing Seth’s brain injury, he indicated that the main damage had been to the front area or “responder” portion of the brain. The doctor reaffirmed that Seth may be able to take in everything going on around him (or some degree less) but cannot respond to his environment vocally or with much movement.

September gave us some absolutely beautiful Pacific Northwest weather, and we were able to get Seth outside in his wheelchair to enjoy the sunshine on a number of occasions. Negotiating the front steps is difficult, however, and we hope to have a new patio installed outside of the French doors to his room with a wheelchair ramp soon, perhaps even before the inevitable winter rains descend upon us. These days his eyes are often fixed out the large window to the left of his bed into the garden where Holly’s magnificent assortment of dahlias is on display in full bloom before a backdrop of other fall colors. We read to him regularly, play the radio and CDs for him, and recently purchased a flat-screen TV that can be set on a movable table over his bed (he seems to be particularly attentive to sports). News from old friends is an especially welcome item that can be read to him.

Much thanks to all who continue to lift Seth up in prayer; the final chapter has not yet been written!

~Craig

**November 2005**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

It was a solemn and sad moment this week as Craig and I stood before the judge to petition for legal guardianship of our son. It’s something that no parent ever anticipates they will have to do, but it was necessary in our situation so that we, not a doctor or a committee of medical personnel, will have the authority to make any critical future medical decisions for Seth. Both our lawyer and the court appointed guardian ad litem, who walked us carefully through the many confusing details and paperwork and then stood with us in front of the judge, were extremely kind and compassionate. The guardian ad litem had spent several hours with us in our home to evaluate the situation and physical set up so that she could honestly report to the judge that she thought it was in Seth’s best interests to be at home, cared for by his parents. She had also spent time with Seth, holding his hand and speaking gently to him as she explained what the legal procedure involved. Her deep concern for him caused the tears to run freely down my face. After reviewing Seth’s case, the only addition the judge wanted included in the legal papers was that Seth would retain his right to vote! It seemed like a pretty moot point to me with his present medical condition, but the judge went on to add, “There is always hope. I’m a firm believer in hope.” Although I had remained fairly composed until then, a lump formed in my throat and I was grateful for his sensitivity to our tragic circumstances.

After being with Seth almost every day for 27 months, I had the opportunity to get away with a friend for three days to attend a ladies’ conference in Chattanooga, TN. The main speaker was one of my favorite Bible teachers, Kay Arthur, and the topic was “Going Through Trials and Difficulties.” I was reminded of many Biblical truths, such as: when you suffer, you find out the true condition of your heart; as you respond correctly to trials, you become a clearer reflection of Jesus Christ; your staying power, which allows you to stand firm during a storm, comes from God; your trial is temporal, but how you respond to it puts a deposit in your character that lasts for eternity, as well as many others.

So, with those truths planted in my heart, I ask myself how we’re doing. As far as the new routine goes, we have adjusted our lives to the added time and physical responsibilities. As far as seeing any “fruit of the spirit” in our lives, we continue to cling to the Lord for strength. But with regard to the overwhelming heartbreak, because there is no closure, we still grieve deeply which sometimes manifests itself in sadness or depression or a feeling of being depleted and drained. The towering waves which were more intense at first, do slowly start subsiding, but at any point, just when you think there is a little calm, a huge wave might come rushing in that overwhelms you . . . like last week at the grocery store. I was racing through the crowds picking up what I needed for Thanksgiving dinner, thinking about the preparations, etc., when over the sound system came a song that I knew Seth used to enjoy. Once again, a devastating sense of loss flooded my soul. I have also realized that in our situation there is not only the “primary” loss of our only son as we knew him, to grieve over, but many secondary issues as well . . . such as the loss of delight in watching one of your children mature and make their mark in the world, the loss of grandchildren to pass on the family name, the loss of our personal free time as well as our freedom to be out together for more than four or five hours (because of his med schedule, which a hired aid is not licensed to give), the loss of enjoying a full night’s sleep, and the list goes on. Yet God assures us, “I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (Isa. 46:4).

~Mary