**February 2006**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

Twenty five years ago some friends of ours had a baby the same summer that Seth was born, but sadly, the little girl was born with a mental disability. Because her development was delayed, when she turned about a year and a half old the parents asked volunteers to help them with a therapy called “patterning.” It worked on the premise that a baby’s brain development is largely associated with basic crawling motions and then continues to develop more complex movements from there. Likewise, those with brain injuries can benefit from such “developmental movements” as others work to program similar arm, leg, and head motions for them. As I helped with Anna, Seth, who was a toddler, played with the other children and watched with interest to what was happening on the little table built for his friend’s therapy. I wonder what we would have thought if we had known that a little over two decades later it would be ME organizing volunteers to work with HIM, only on a much bigger table and a much larger scale. We are now in our third week of “patterning” with Seth. We have over 45 rotating volunteers who graciously give of their time and love so that we can do this special form of therapy with Seth for an hour a day, six days a week. It takes five people at one time moving his arms, legs and head in a crawling type motion. We also do special breathing exercises and then finish up with Seth on the floor, on his stomach, helping him work to push with his legs. Everyone (probably especially Seth) feel like they’ve had a gym workout when the hour is over and he’s finally resting comfortably in his wheelchair. Then in the evenings, before we get him back to bed, Craig and I put him on his stomach on the floor for another hour or more. The therapist who trained us to work with Seth explained that when he is in bed, it’s only a holding position for him; nothing happens with the brain. But when he’s being exercised or on the floor on his stomach, there is an opportunity for him to experiment with movements that we’ve been programming into his brain.

Although we have heard many stories of remarkable and unexpected improvements in brain-injured people through such “patterning,” we are very guarded in our expectations and we know that we have a long road ahead of us. But, surprisingly to us, we have seen a number of small changes in this short amount of time and we realize that with a brain injury, even small things are large steps. For instance, we’ve seen a lot more movement in his right foot as well as motion originating in his knee and hip; his left foot, which had been totally unresponsive, has moved up and down dozens of times; he has lifted his head, shoulders and elbow slightly; we’ve put his arm out straight and he’s slowly pulled it across the floor towards his head. Small things are big things and my heart is touched as I hear the volunteers rooting and cheering for Seth as if he was a star athlete. Although I was dreading the thought of having people in my home six days a week (I like my private space, and quiet!) each person has blessed and enriched our lives with their bright spirits and caring hearts.

And what is Seth thinking? Sometimes when we’re working with him, he makes a series of moaning sounds . . . it could mean it hurts, or it could be his way of telling the volunteers to keep working and please don’t give up on him. Last week he and Craig were having a quiet evening sitting by the fire in the living room (Seth, of course, was in his wheelchair) and Craig asked him if he gets frustrated. He immediately started moving his foot up and down and likewise responded when asked if God is more real to him now than He was before the accident. Continue to pray that God would work mightily with his spirit as we work diligently with his body.

~Mary

**March 2006**

**A Father’s Perspective**

*“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow”* (James 4:13) . . .*“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth”* (Prov. 27:1). It is a part of a man’s nature to plan and to dream, but we’ve learned that our plans must be held lightly and with an open palm toward the Lord.

The last time I spoke with my son was when I drove him to SeaTac airport early on Monday morning, August 11, 2003, just five days prior to his accident. After our goodbyes I drove off and glanced back to see him stride into the terminal, his backpack slung over his shoulder. That impression is now etched in my memory, and it raises itself often. Seth had flown home from summer school to be in his cousin’s wedding, and I fondly recall picking him up at the airport four days earlier and having breakfast with him at a nearby restaurant before taking him home. He was so excited about school, about beginning his senior year of college in Riverside, California, and we laughed together as he shared a lot of humorous stories about his work and the classes he had attended. I was proud that Seth had been able to work over 30 hours a week at two jobs (Home Depot and a clothing store, Hollister’s) while pulling good grades as a full time student. He was enthusiastic about graduating the following spring, then going on to receive a second bachelor’s degree after another semester, then moving on to grad school, and then . . ? As parents, we share such dreams, do we not? How tragic that those dreams would soon be dashed alongside a California freeway.

And now, as parents, we continue to do whatever we can to help Seth achieve whatever potential he has. Having him home affords us more opportunities to do so. With the help of over 50 volunteers we are continuing with his patterning therapy. In addition, we recently took Seth to a chiropractor who specializes in upper neck problems, specifically, the area where the uppermost vertebrae and the skull come in contact. That delicate area houses the connection of the brain stem and spinal cord, which transmit all kinds of information throughout the body. In the accident Seth had sustained an unusual break in that area, and we assumed the trauma may indeed have knocked this connection out of alignment. This is a situation that neurologists typically do not address, and the chiropractor informed us that even being out of alignment only half a degree can create various problems (since nerves may be pinched), and that persons entering his clinic with a related malady of some sort are, on the average, out of alignment a little over two degrees. X-rays revealed Seth was out of alignment by three and a half degrees. This might explain why he has favored turning his head to the left. The doctor is carefully realigning the connection, but cannot predict what (or if any) outward improvements will occur. We can only hope. Each week for the next few months we’ll be borrowing a van with wheelchair accessibility to transport Seth to his clinic about a half hour away for follow-up. Pray for results!

Pray also for Mary, who will be having extensive surgery on her right foot on the 22nd due to painful deformation from her rheumatoid arthritis (the other foot will have to wait until fall). She will have to be completely off of that foot for a month which will eliminate the possibility of her standing over Seth’s bed to carry out her typical day to day care of his needs, let alone all the other tasks she manages in making our household run efficiently. It’ll be a stretch for all of us.

~Craig

**April 2006 (Easter Sunday)**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

As I spent a few minutes last night curled up on the couch looking through Seth’s photo album, I was drawn to the variety of expressions on his face, probably because we have missed that part of him so much. Although physically he looks like he could just sit up and hop right off the bed, his only facial expression for the past 32 months has been an occasional look of pain when he coughs. Reminiscing, I laugh at the MISCHIEVOUS look of a 4-year old as he gets ready to throw a snowball at his sister; and then the EXCITEMENT of a little towheaded boy on his birthday as he sits in his Superman PJ’s opening pirate Legos. I flip a few pages and see a little older Seth JOYFULLY holding our new puppy, and then comes a picture of him

EXUBERANTLY running on the ocean beach, pretending to be Eric Liddel, the Olympic gold medalist from the 1920's! As I flip through the years, I note a look of DETERMINATION on his 12th birthday as he readies for his annual foot race with his Dad to see who is fastest (yes, Dad “caved” that year)! I love the PRIDE registered on Seth’s face as a young man standing next to his dad, his hero, in matching Christmas sweaters. One of the last shots the camera caught is Seth, at 22,BUBBLING OVER WITH ANTICIPATION as he sits in his Chevy 210 pickup loaded with his belongings, waving goodbye as he’s ready to start the long drive to California to attend California Baptist University. I’m glad that we didn’t know at the time that when he came home again, it would be in a medical jet, not the Chevy.

Over the last month, Seth has shown some improvements; a new move of a foot or hand, a lifting of an arm, more flexibility in moving during the therapeutic patterning. Everything is small, but with a brain injury we remind ourselves that even “small” is good. But the most exciting change has been his ability to show some facial expression! One evening we were working on having him try to maintain eye contact with us instead of the more usual condition of having his eyes non-sensibly darting back and forth. We could tell that he was working hard to try and keep his eyes focused on Craig’s when all of a sudden his forehead scrunched and his eyebrows lifted! We started laughing out loud because it made his face look more like “the old Seth!” We have found in the last week that he is able to repeat that action almost every time we ask and it still makes me laugh and cheer. To see a smile would be even more precious and unbelievable! I remember shortly after Seth was hurt, we heard from another family who was about two years ahead of us with a brain injury and they reported that their son was just beginning to learn to feed himself. I commented to Craig that if that was all the further along we are after two years, I wouldn’t be able to stand it. But, here we are at 32 months, cheering Seth on, grateful for each improvement. Yesterday I asked him if he gets frustrated at not being able to move like he wants to, and immediately his eyebrows started vigorously going up and down.

We have been able to start a lot of new things with Seth since he’s been home. Of course, the biggest is the continued daily patterning accomplished with a huge league of dedicated volunteers, but we’ve also added chiropractic care for his neck that was hit so hard during the accident, a number of nutritional supplements, and a new drug that sometimes helps brain injuries. In the next month, I will be replacing the canned liquid he gets in his feeding tube (the first three ingredients are sugar!) and begin making and blending all of his food. Also, through the generosity of many friends, we will be purchasing a machine called a Quadriciser (you can see it online at <http://www.quadriciser.com)>quadriciser.com) which is a motorized machine consisting of pulleys and cables that Seth will be using several hours every day. It will aid in keeping all his joints mobile as well as hopefully helping him make new brain connections by the continued repetitive movements.

As we look to this year’s Resurrection Sunday, we are grateful for what the Lord Jesus has done thus far on our behalf. We also continue to cry out to the Lord that He would bring about a physical resurrection in our own son. Thank you for your continued prayers and support. Each note or hug or kindness is an encouragement to continue on.

~Mary

**June 2006**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

I had to laugh at church this week when I asked one of the kids where his little 3-year old brother was. He earnestly replied, “He had a really long week, so my parents let him sleep in.” Just wait, if he thinks three is tough! As I look back, it seems that each phase of life keeps getting “tougher”. I remember in high school when the college kids told you how much more work you had once you started college. It was true. And for me, things got even more intense once I graduated and started teaching. Whew! But that was nothing compared to the time invested when our family had young ones, and then eventually home schooling those kids for 17 years!

Now with Craig and I taking the responsibility of giving Seth 24/7 care, life has again taken a major leap in the area of time commitment. But for us, after having him home for 10 months, putting him back in the nursing home is not an option. So what does a “typical” day look like? Besides doing the middle-of-the-night care, Craig is up before me, starting Seth’s early morning routine as well as reading the Bible to him. My first responsibility is getting a meal into Seth, of which I’ll do five times by the end of the day. His diet consists of a lot of fruits and vegetables, chicken or beef, our fresh eggs (we have chickens) and a number of other nutritious items, all blended together in my Vita Mix. If our whole family ate like this we would be a lot healthier, I remember thinking one day as I was munching on a donut! It takes 20 minutes to do a gravity drip into his stomach tube each time he’s fed. Then it’s time for a complete make-over for Seth, which includes a bed bath, shampoo, shave, nail and teeth care. By this time we are ready to get him dressed and transferred into the Quadriciser (see a picture of him in it on his web page, sethesvelt.com, at the end of the photo section), an exercise machine that keeps his body moving, and will hopefully be helping him make some new neural connections. Although I have to keep my eyes on him during this hour and a half and his positions need to be changed a number of times, this is my opportunity to get his laundry done and clean up the kitchen. Then we’re preparing for the team of daily patterners to come in, where he’ll receive another hour of exercise on his stomach on the therapy table. The volunteers slide him into his wheelchair when they’re finished and then it’s Seth’s time to work with swallowing; I use small pieces of ice chips and ice cream. A good day is if he swallows a dozen small bites of ice and several bites of ice cream in an hour without any major gagging. Then it’s back into the Quadriciser for another hour and a half of exercise. This allows me time to make dinner as well as complete phone calls and paper work that continually needs to be done on Seth’s behalf. It’s still not time for a break for Seth, because now he’s put on the floor on his stomach for an hour or more, as an extension of the earlier patterning exercises. Finally, it’s back in bed for the evening where we may work with eye coordination exercises before Craig reads to him as he’s drifting off to sleep. So that’s how the day goes, with the rest of life lived as best we can between the lines, and tomorrow will be just the same.

I realize that there are many times in life where you feel like you are stretched to the max. But the hardest part about the phase we are in now is that we are not only stretched but there seems to be no rewards in return for the huge amount of physical and emotional energy expended. For instance, when our children were small, I remember always being exhausted by the end of the day, but the rewards more than made up for it, e.g., lots of hugs, kisses and smiles, as well as having the delight of watching the kids grow and mature. With Seth, we don’t know if he even has the slightest idea of all that is happening on his behalf. If he does, I know he would be grateful and humbled.

Some have suggested that the greatest reward during difficult times is that a person feels so much closer to the Lord, but that is not always true. I think of Job, when he said, “But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him . . .” (Job 23:8). Likewise, we are living in a time when God seems to be distant. I heard Rick Warren, the author of the best-selling book The Purpose Driven Life, mention on the radio this morning that in every Christian’s life there will be at least one period when they go through a time when God seems to be silent. In biographies of great Christians from the past they referred to it as “the dark night of the soul.” But at the end of Job’s comments about God seeming to abandon him, he inserts, “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” We put our hope in the fact that He is still intimately involved in our lives, no matter how long or tough or hard the days may seem.

~Mary

**August 2006**

**A Father’s Perspective**

*“Who, O God, is like You? Though You have made me see troubles, many and bitter, You will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth You will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again.”* (Psalm 71:19-20)

This week marks the three-year anniversary since Seth’s accident. Looking back to at least that long ago and remembering Seth as the active, ambitious, and fun-loving son that he was is a bittersweet pastime but assuredly more palatable these days than the uncertainty of looking ahead to the commitment of his long-term care. Just three years ago Seth was enjoying the summer in Riverside, California, having remained to attend summer school at Cal Baptist University to pick up a few more credits prior to beginning his senior year while holding on to a couple of part-time jobs, playing some rounds of golf, and making occasional forays to the beach to surf. Four summers ago he was working in construction, often balancing on a two-by-six, two stories up, deftly hammering trusses into place. On Sundays he played his guitar for our worship team. Five summers ago he was hiking in the Swiss Alps, cliff diving from a Greek isle into the Mediterranean Sea, spending his 21st birthday sick with food poisoning in Paris (and taking time to wire his mom flowers for her birthday), and riding the rails to various other sites in Europe with his friend, Jesse. He loved life, people, and activity, and I’m glad that he was at least able to cram some adventure into his first 23 years. I hope that he, too, is able to reflect on some pleasant memories.

But in fact, we constantly find ourselves wondering whether he remembers anything at all or how much he is aware of what is going on around him. Certainly his expression (or lack thereof) doesn’t betray any such mental activity. But then he’ll surprise us, like he did a few weeks back when an acquaintance from the nursing care center where Seth spent almost two years called to talk to Mary, then asked to speak to Seth. As Mary held the receiver up to his ear, Seth suddenly raised his eyebrows. Later, the woman confirmed to Mary that she had asked Seth to do so! Or, when his cousin stopped by for a visit and asked Seth if he knew who it was that was speaking to him and whether he understood what he was saying, and Seth began somewhat vigorously moving his right foot. We still cling to the hope that the same Seth we knew before the accident is still locked away inside of that muted, immobilized body, waiting to break out someday, like Lazarus responding to the voice of the Lord.

In the meantime, the daily patterning therapy continues along with several hours of being exercised on his Quadriciser machine. Sadly, he seems to be making but little progress otherwise. Knowing he was a sun-lover, we wheel Seth out onto our new patio daily to enjoy the gorgeous summer weather occasioned by the Puget Sound climate.

Three years and a lot of turmoil, tears, and heartache later we now find ourselves in a decidedly different and difficult routine. Seth’s care takes roughly two to three hours out of my day and for Mary, about eight hours. The adjustment is ongoing and our faith no less challenged. The flurry of cards, calls, and e-mails that helped prop us up during those early traumatic days has understandably tapered off, although we are still pleasantly surprised to receive occasional notes, even from people heretofore unknown to us who are praying for us and for Seth. It must be encouraging to Seth to know that people still think of him.

-Craig

**October 2006**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

There are always points in your life that you look back on as being significant, usually because they were accompanied by great joy or deep sorrow. Of course, August 16, 2003 is one of those times for our family, the day we started our journey with Seth *“through the valley of the shadow of death.”* And there are other important times of needed encouragement, such as the one I experienced a few weeks ago. I was privileged to spend a week in Philadelphia with 100 other parents of brain-injured children at the Institute for the Achievement of Human Potential, a group consisting of neurologists, doctors, therapists and child development specialists that has effectively worked with brain-injured people for over 60 years. The parents came from 14 different countries and 18 different states, but we all experienced the instant common bond of wanting to do everything possible to help our child reach their potential despite their current injury. The seminar included 50 hours of lectures and demonstrations in five days, and even though it was a grueling schedule, no one wanted to leave at the end of each evening. The Institute is the same group that in 1955 developed the patterning therapy we do each day, and although patterning is still the foundation of what they recommend they presented literally dozens of other ways to encourage the brain to make new connections through visual, auditory and tactile stimulation. Some kids have made a full recovery on this program, and most at least make improvements, but there are, also, those that don’t progress at all. We are grateful, though, to at least have been given a multitude of new ideas to develop a specialized program to try with Seth, even though the directors of the Institute themselves called the plan that they were proposing “totally unreasonable” because of the huge time commitment involved–as much as eight to ten hours a day, seven days a week. However, as any parent would agree, if you started seeing progress where before there was no hope, that would be too few hours. But it does (once again) stretch us past what we thought imaginable. Pray for me to have the physical stamina, emotional stability and unselfish love needed to move forward.

Added fun for the week was that Kirsten and my sister and her daughter accompanied me to Philadelphia, so while I was in class during the day they had the opportunity to explore the area, including seeing the Statue of Liberty and Ground Zero, Valley Forge, and Amish country. In the evenings we’d get back and compare notes as we ate at different little outdoor cafes. We stayed in the historic Chestnut Hill area, where the homes, churches and shops were all built around 1850 in beautiful grey stone. Original cobblestone streets ran in front of our renovated historic hotel which dated back to the late 1700's. It made for a peaceful setting to get rejuvenated before we started the next fast-paced day.

Already we have seen a few small positive signs as we have started this new phase of treatment for Seth, e.g., more movements in his arms, legs, and feet. A few weeks ago, as one of the patterning team was coaxing him, he fixed his eyes on her and slowly lifted his whole arm off the table and grasped one of her fingers before letting it drop back. Another small step. Obviously anything with the brain is unpredictable, so we continue to earnestly call out to the Lord, the ultimate healer, to extend His mercy on our son.

~Mary

**November 2006**

**A Father’s Perspective**

“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him?” (1Cor. 2:11)

At first it seemed like a routine morning as I flipped on the light switch and walked into the kitchen. It was odd, though, that I thought I could hear Seth breathing a little louder than normal in his room next to where I was preparing his first meds for the day. When I walked into his room I sensed something was wrong, and my suspicions were confirmed when I turned the light on and saw his entire body twitching, his eyes wide and darting, with a scared look. I yelled for Mary to come quickly. Although we had never seen this before, we knew Seth was having a major seizure. A quick call was made to our son-in-law, Matthew, an ICU nurse, who advised us to call 911 immediately. The medics arrived about 15 minutes later and administered Valium to bring the seizure under control. Seth’s temperature was 104.2 degrees and was most likely the cause of the seizure. After four days in the hospital where blood tests, x-rays, and a CT scan looked in vain for an infection that could have brought on the fever, the doctor could only shrug and say, “Maybe it was a 24-hour virus.”

This was on a Tuesday morning, and the record-breaking rains for November had caused devastating floods around western Washington, including the Snoqualmie Valley, where most of our church members live. It was also the week when a friend, a mother of three teenaged daughters and much-loved in our small church, succumbed to cancer. I found myself spending a lot of time between two hospitals and preparing for a memorial service on Sunday.

Up to this point, Seth hadn’t had a seizure since he was living at the nursing care center over two years ago, and it was discouraging to be informed that we would have to increase his anti-seizure medicine at a time when we had just been given the OK by his neurologist to taper him off of it slowly (it tends to dull one’s senses). Fortunately, Seth appeared to suffer no ill effects from the seizure, or from the infection he picked up at the hospital. In fact, during the past few weeks we have seen more new movements with him than we have for a long time. We have also been giving him Ambien, a prescription sleeping pill, which in rare cases and for reasons yet unknown has actually awakened some comatose patients. This past week he lifted his right arm and touched his head and opened and closed his right hand on command. He also reached up of his own accord and pointed his finger skyward (giving credit where it was due, perhaps?). We even saw some small movements on his left side. And when I held my hand out above him, he unsteadily reached up and grabbed it and gave me a good, hard squeeze. I said, “Son, if you could talk, you’d probably have a lot to say to us, right?” He blinked rapidly several times in response.

~Craig

**December 2006**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

It was Sunday morning, December 24, and we were in church singing about the wise men presenting their gifts to the Christ child–gold, frankincense and myrrh. I was reminded that my name, Mary, means myrrh. Myrrh is a very bitter plant, but when cut it produces an extremely sweet fragrance. Many thoughts went through my mind as I pondered the analogy of my life being a gift, although deeply cut, presented to the Lord. There are daily temptations to succumb to discouragement, disappointment and depression, the forerunners of bitterness, as I remember the vibrant, intelligent, diligent, conscientious young man Seth was before his accident. I used to think that losing a child would be the most difficult circumstance a parent could ever be called to endure, but now I believe having a child live who has sustained a traumatic brain injury is a deeper, or at least much longer, valley. Only someone else who has walked that path can truly understand the continued grief and sadness that hangs over your life, and so we were encouraged this month as we had the opportunity to share a meal with Pat and Shirley Boone while they were in our area for a granddaughter’s wedding. They are such a godly older couple, and have graciously kept up with us and lovingly encouraged us since the early days of our ordeal. Their grandson, Ryan, also sustained a TBI about five years ago, so they intimately understand the physical exhaustion, emotional upheavals and spiritual struggles that accompany our situation. As we opened our hearts to them, we experienced a measure of healing through a shared camaraderie. I know that the legacy I want to leave is not one of bitterness but one of having lived a life, although deeply wounded and cut, that leaves behind a sweet fragrance as a gift to the Christ, and blesses many others as well. I relate to the statement by Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, who said that “Life can only be understood backwards, although it must be lived forward.” I know I’ll probably never completely comprehend how our life story fits into His eternal story, but faith tenaciously hangs onto the sovereignty and goodness of God despite hardships.

Since our last update we have continued to see progress in Seth. He seems to have periods during the day when he is more alert and focused, particularly after he has received a small dose of Ambien. A few weeks back, while in his wheelchair, he reached for one of his old juggling balls that Craig was holding out before him, grabbed it, and actually made an awkward but successful attempt to throw it forward toward Craig when asked! Another of those times came on Christmas Day when I was leaning over his wheelchair working with his mouth, and Craig said, “Hey, Seth, give your Mom a hug!” I thought it was an impossible command, but to our astonishment, he took his right arm, which had been sitting on his lap, put it around my back and pulled me tightly toward himself! It was a pretty unbelievable Christmas present (and brought its share of tears!) which he’s repeated several times since then! Another remarkable step forward came just last week when we decided to make large flash cards with different commands on them that we’ve seen him do before, such as ‘raise your eyebrows,’ ‘lift your arm,’ ‘thumbs up,’ ‘kick your foot,’ or ‘shut your eyes.’ To our amazement, he often has been able to read the cards, process the information, and do the commands! That involves yet another complicated mental process, but also reaffirms what the neurologists have told us from the beginning, that the part of Seth’s brain which was injured was the “responder” part and he is probably taking in (and remembering) more than we realize.

At our church this morning, one of the men voiced a prayer for Seth, saying, “Lord, might we be so bold as to come before you and ask that this might be the year of Seth’s healing.” Thank you to each one of you who has so faithfully sustained our family through your prayers and has continued to cry out to the Lord for Seth’s recovery.

~Mary