**May 2009
Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

After a particularly long winter, spring is finally, grudgingly, arriving in the Puget Sound area. As I drive Seth to the outpatient therapy that he has three times a week, I point out all the spectacular flowering trees. I’m not sure he can see them, because his vision is most clear 12 to 18 inches from his face, so I describe the scene in detail. I have a Fernando Ortega CD playing in the background and the words catch my attention, so I turn the volume up to listen. It’s a song about a little boy growing up and the chorus repeats, “This time next year, as we gather in your home, we’ll have stories to tell.” And I can’t help but remember Seth as an energetic little boy, and now a severely limited grown man, and I wonder what stories we will have to tell in a year.

Although Seth’s improvements continue to be small, he has certainly disproved the doctor’s initial, typical traumatic brain injury prediction that whatever a patient gets back in the first six to twelve months is all he’ll ever have. We spent some time this winter working with an augmented communication specialist in Seattle, who designed a basic starting system for Seth. It involves a two inch wide, flat button hooked up to his wheelchair, which in turn is hooked up to a lap top computer. By pushing and releasing the button, he might play an arcade dart game, or a Star Wars game. Our favorite involves family pictures that we programmed in as puzzles, so each time he presses the button, a piece of the puzzle falls into place on the screen until it’s completed. Some days he is quite successful at all of this, and some days his tone is too tight to get his arm or fingers moving correctly. I’m sure it must be frustrating for him. When the point comes that he is able to do this procedure with accuracy, we’ll move on to the next step. It is a long way from communicating, but it is a start. Also in the last few months Craig designed and built a tilt board which we use in the evenings two or three times a week. Seth is securely strapped onto the six foot long, padded board with a foot rest, and then is slowly raised up by a ceiling lift, in increments, until he’s almost standing upright. I forgot how tall he is! The therapists say that it not only helps maintain his bone density in preparation for perhaps walking some day, but as pressure is put on the bottom of his feet the sensation sends all sorts of new patterns to his brain.

We’re still confident that Seth takes in a lot that is going on around him, even though he has few communication skills. For instance, a few months ago, I had to have surgery to replace a joint in a finger. I had mentioned the surgery to Seth several times, but before I left for the operation I went into his room and asked him if he was going to remember to pray for me that morning. He looked at me and scrunched his eyes tightly shut, opened and scrunched, and a third time, opened and scrunched. I’m guessing that meant, YES, YES, YES!

I was thinking about the scripture today from Isaiah 40:29 and 31. “He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength . . . but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” The days are still long, and often overwhelming. Between the two of us, it often takes 10-12 hours a day to maintain what we do for Seth and, after five and a half years of learning to adjust to this “winter,” we still hope for a “spring.” Soaring like eagles is exhilarating and running is rewarding, but it’s the daily steady walking that requires the Lord’s renewing strength to give us the ability to persevere, especially during times of discouragement. Hopefully, “this time next year, as we gather in your home, we’ll have stories to tell.”

~Mary

**July 2009**

**A Father’s Perspective**

*“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? . . . If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me become night,’ even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.”* (Psalm 139)

This month (July 11th) Seth will turn 29 years old. That’s hard to believe because the events of his birth still seem so fresh in my mind. Holding a vigil in the hospital lobby that Friday morning were a few men from a prayer group I usually met with on that day. Fortunately, for Mary, it was a relatively easy delivery compared to her first experience. When our first child, a daughter (Holly) was born, I had not particularly cared whether it would be a boy or a girl, but this time, since we already had a daughter, I must confess I was hoping for a son. Recalling the good times I had with my own dad, playing catch, fishing, and doing other “guy” stuff, I was longing for the same experience, and so I was overjoyed to hear the doctor announce, “You have a son!” Soon thereafter I was proudly holding Seth Michael up and mouthing the words, “It’s a boy!” to Steve, Don, and Jim through the thick nursery ward window. A few weeks later at our church, we dedicated our infant son to the Lord to be used for His purposes.

I was 29 years old when Seth was conceived and born, and so a whole generation has flown by, all too quickly. Predictably, there were indeed the fishing trips and “guy” activities. I remember the first time I took him out to the street in front of our house to show him how to throw and catch a football, when he was about ten. It bounced off his chest. Later, I would tell him, “Go!” and count, “One thousand one, etc., to one thousand five” before I would fling the ball. Years later I would give the “Go!” command and immediately heave as hard as I could just to keep it ahead of him. That also brings to mind his annual birthday challenges to a foot race and the day he handily beat me on his 14th, due to his youth, determination, and a superior mix of athletic genes. For 23 years, Seth afforded me the pride and challenges, the ups and downs of being a dad to a son, and I wouldn’t trade them for anything. Now I try to dwell more on the years I enjoyed with him rather than yearn for the years ahead that I had always anticipated.

Grief can be multi-faceted, and so there are dimensions of grief that continue to reside in our souls. We grieve because we miss Seth, although we’re with him physically 24 hours a day. We grieve because our own future appears so different than what we had always envisioned and hoped for. But most of all, we grieve for Seth because of the opportunities in life that he will not be able to experience: the delights of marriage, the joy of raising a family, the demands and rewards of a career, and the fulfillment of serving the Lord with a life partner. Barring the miraculous, he’ll never be able to toss a ball to a son of his own. Several weeks from now I will be officiating at the wedding of Seth’s best friend, Jesse, with whom he shared many skiing and surfing trips and even a European tour some years back. Life goes on for most everyone else, and life is replete with mysteries of the Lord that, in our finite minds, we will never be able to understand.

The physical and occupational therapy that Seth has been involved in, three days a week for the past 20 months, will be discontinued in August. With over 150 sessions, he hasn’t made enough progress to justify the Medicare expenses. Likewise, the patterning therapy he has received at home from volunteers over the past three and a half years will also most likely be concluded. Of course, we are greatly disappointed that our son has not come back to us, to any significant extent, after nearly six years. We can only speculate on how much he comprehends or what he thinks about, still locked away in his own private, muted world. I asked him recently, “Seth, do you talk much to God? Blink if you do.” In response, his eyes blinked and his eyebrows raised. So, perhaps there is Someone with Whom he enjoys two-way conversation, Who can bypass the darkness of a damaged brain to commune with His child.

~Craig

**November 2009**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

We’re just coming to the end of a stunning autumn in the Northwest. The spectacular fall colors revive and refresh the spirit. But just as each season brings fresh hope, there are also new challenges. After living in the Puget Sound for 33 years, I have still not been able to embrace the winter gray days with their almost nonstop rain. BUT . . . I absolutely love the year-round green!

Our life for the past last six years, as we’ve dealt with Seth’s accident, seems to have been in seasons as well. In 2003, in a matter of seconds, we went from living the life we’d known and anticipated, to having our world turned upside down. We experienced eight grueling weeks of daily life-and-death crises in the ICU in both Riverside and Seattle, with a number of emergencies that could have ended Seth’s life.

The next season lasted 22 months, when Seth was transferred to a long term care center. It was almost surrealistic sitting in a nursing home amidst elderly and physically or mentally incapacitated patients with our strapping son who was supposed to be in an apartment at Cal Baptist University at that time and enjoying his senior year of college. Because the neurologist indicated that the part of his brain that was injured was the responding part, and he might understand much of what was happening around him, we purposed to be at his side 10-12 hours a day to offset likely feelings of abandonment. There were many small crises during this period, and often I arrived for a 12-hour shift and just sat in the car for a few minutes, wondering how I could spend one more day surrounded by tragedy. A frequent prayer was, “Lord, give me the grace to live with sadness, grief and loss today and yet to radiate Your joy.” After a 725-day marathon and putting 66,000 miles on the car, we were anxious to enter the next season, that of having Seth at home.

But I was very naive about Seth’s home care. I had envisioned that, after a full night’s sleep, I’d be up and dressed at the crack of dawn with hair and makeup done. Then I’d sit by Seth’s bed with my notebook open, jotting down thoughts from all the great Christian morning radio speakers. Perhaps I’d even have my sewing machine next to his bed so I could do some quilting while I had one-way chats with him! What do the young people say? – NOT! The reality was that for the next four years we invested 10-12 hours every day in his care and therapy. Besides what we did for him personally, we were joined by over 50 rotating volunteers who provided over 3½ years of often daily patterning therapy (That meant the doorbell rang well over 4000 times as people graciously came to invest in Seth’s life!). We also transported Seth to the hospital for 150 sessions of occupational, physical or speech therapy. By the end of four years, we concluded that he had come as far as he could with this daily schedule, and so that whirlwind season ended the last of August.

Last month, as I was finally anticipating a quieter week, we awoke at 4:30 one morning as Seth was in the throes of a grand mal seizure that continued off and on for almost two hours. It was later determined that his anti-seizure medicine was not being totally absorbed into his system. He was hospitalized for 3½ days and, besides coming home with a MRSA infection (which we are still dealing with), it was also determined that he had walking pneumonia. Despite this setback it has otherwise been a welcome slower season, even though caring for someone who is 100% dependant will always be labor-intensive.

Actually, he has smiled more often lately in response to his Dad’s unending supply of one-liners. Also, he is getting some movement in his left shoulder and arm, much like what began to happen four years ago on his right side. He has also had some very successful sessions using his thumb on the augmented communication computer switch program that was designed for him. So, we continue to persevere.

In October, I was privileged to give three talks for a ladies’ conference at our former church, which I titled STRENGTH FOR LIFE’S STRUGGLES. When asked beforehand if he was praying for me, Seth emphatically blinked his eyes a number of times! Oh, how I delight in those prayers! Hopefully, in the next month, we will be able to make a copy of the conference available to anyone interested. We’ll keep you posted. Meanwhile, may God be glorified through our lives because He is worthy of our worship.

~Mary