**February 2010**

**A Father's Perspective**

You may be interested to know that we’ve made some changes to Seth’s web site, [www.sethesvelt.com](http://www.sethesvelt.com). A switch in the internet host was made so that we (with our meager computer skills) won’t have to rely so much on others to make future additions and other changes. New pictures have been added to the photo link, and we have made some talks available as downloads that Mary shared at a ladies conference she spoke at last October. She presented three messages on the theme, “Strength for Life’s Struggles” that dealt with her response to unexpected challenges that have arisen in her life such as her rheumatoid arthritis and, of course, Seth’s accident and subsequent care. If you wish to hear them and cannot download the messages you can email us (mesvelt@juno.com) and we would be glad to send you CDs.

A very wise man once wrote, *In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him* (Eccl. 7:14). As the old saying goes, “We don’t know what tomorrow holds, but we know Who holds tomorrow,” and believing that gives us hope as we realize that, although life is unpredictable (as Mary’s talks point out), we can find comfort in the fact that life is not truly haphazard when a loving God holds the reins, that nothing ever takes Him by surprise, that He is never forced to ad lib, and that even tragedies such as Seth’s accident and incapacitation have a purpose behind them, despite our being largely unaware of it all at this time.

Having said all that, it seems to us that we have settled into a more predictable and manageable daily schedule, due largely to our discontinuation of team volunteers coming in almost daily to work the patterning therapy with Seth as well as the frequent trips to the hospital for additional therapy. What therapy he receives now is limited to a state-funded care-giver who comes in several hours a week, the Quadriciser exercise machine he is put into each day, a homemade tilt board he is strapped onto two or three times a week, and whatever else Dad and Mom provide. His overall physical condition continues to surprise people, and even his neuro-rehab physician recently remarked that Seth is in better shape than her other patients with similar brain trauma. Her only advice was to encourage us to maintain his good physical condition since new research and treatments in brain trauma are forthcoming, due largely to our nation’s response to the unfortunate reality of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with similar kinds of injuries.

Other than that, there has been little change in his responsiveness. A frequent question Mary and I ask each other is, “What is going on in his mind right now, and how much is he aware of what is going on around him?” He does smile more often when my remarks and antics merit it, and occasionally we will even catch him smiling for no apparent reason. What is he thinking? We asked his doctor why he can respond to humor but seems incapable of other emotions such as anger or sadness that would also be reflected on his face, but she could only shrug her shoulders. The only other expression he shows is a kind of pained grimace, and we surmise that he is uncomfortable and we can only watch helplessly or, at best, give him some Tylenol, since he cannot tell us where it hurts.

February afforded us a week or so of unusually nice weather while, it seems, the rest of the country was buried in snow. Knowing that Seth was a sun lover, we wheeled him out on to the patio to enjoy the balmy days. Our more typical rainy Puget Sound days are, naturally, spent indoors, where Seth often becomes a (reluctant?) captive audience to his dad’s stumbling attempts to play his son’s old Yamaha guitar. A few months ago I decided that his guitar needed to come out of retirement and so I began taking lessons. An occasional smile crosses his face whenever I struggle with some fingering and mutter out loud about my clumsiness, and from time to time I put the instrument on his lap, position his hand over the top and watch as he makes attempts to pluck the strings. He obviously remembers and can only be frustrated. Kirsten mentioned that, years back, she used to go to sleep in the next room listening to Seth play his guitar. I do miss hearing him play as before.

Seth will turn 30 years old this year, a milestone of sorts that I’ve not particularly been looking forward to since it is a reminder to us that he has missed out on so much of life since his 23rd year. For most people in their twenties, life is full of change, challenge and anticipation, and that was certainly true for Mary and me. Predictably (!) his friends are married, having children of their own, and pursuing various careers, but he (and we, to an extent) are like passengers who had to get off a train, sit on a bench and adjust to fixed surroundings while watching others move on down the track toward new horizons. In reality, it is only that we are moving down another track.

*But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand . .”* (Ps. 31:15)

~Craig

**May 2010**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

Remember when you were a child and used to ponder the question, “Would I rather die by burning or freezing?” (Come on, I’m not the only one who thought about that!) Actually, we had a friend who nearly experienced both. When Doug was 16, he was in bed nursing two broken legs from pole vaulting when his home exploded from a gas leak. Although he survived, Doug sustained 2nd and 3rd degree burns on 90% of his body and until 2009, when he passed away at age 59, he experienced continual physical repercussions from his injuries. As a young dad with four children, he was moving his family from Texas to Washington and was caught in a deadly white-out blizzard in New Mexico. Although his family (most of whom were not with him in the moving van) was safe before the crisis turned fatal for others, he and one of the children were in the last group of people to be rescued alive. They were taken to a nearby farmhouse where they stayed for three days until they could get plowed out. During that time our friend, who had spent some time out in the blizzard searching for the rest of his family, was unconscious and would have died except for the fact that, in God’s providence, also stranded with him was a World War I nurse who specialized in treating frostbite. The old gentleman prayed over Doug and worked with his body non-stop for the three days. Even aside from these events, our friend experienced other traumatic events throughout his life to a greater degree than most folks could ever imagine, and people would occasionally ask him, “What do you think God is trying to teach you through this?” I’m sure they were expecting something deeply profound, but his reply was usually a simple, “Just keep going on.”

I appreciate that answer because it describes where we usually find ourselves. The days and weeks often blur together as we repeat the same essential routines in caring for Seth over and over and over. Last week, as it seemed life was moving predictably on, he had a grand mal seizure. Fortunately, this was one time when a three-day excursion to the hospital wasn’t necessary, possibly due to a strong dose of Valium we were able to administer to Seth that brought the seizure under control within six minutes (compared to his last one that lasted for almost three hours). Our concern is, though, that this is the first time he’s had a seizure for no apparent reason, so it changes the dynamics within our home. The neurologist had told us long ago that seizures would probably be common for Seth because of his head injury, but we were hoping it wouldn’t prove true. So, with the immediate crisis over, it was back to the daily persevering, the “keep on going” part. The “keep on going”—even when you don’t see any improvements, the “keep on going” when you’re tired and discouraged. And the question arises, where does that persevering ability come from? Is it just our own resolve to push on and “gut it up?” Is it our own willpower to endure? I think the song, *He Giveth More Grace* written by Annie Johnson Flint describes it best:

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;*

*He sendeth more strength when the labors increase.*

*To added affliction, He addeth His mercies,*

*To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,*

*When our strength has failed ‘ere the day is half done,*

*When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,*

*Our Father’s full giving has only begun.*

*His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,*

*His power no boundary known unto man;*

*For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,*

 *He giveth and giveth and giveth again.*

Like our friend Doug, Annie is one of my heroes and real-life role model, even though she was born 100 years before me. She was orphaned before she was three and had several terrible years of being passed around until she was adopted by the Flint family. At 18, she contracted the most crippling, painful form of rheumatoid arthritis, which in a small way I relate to (see Mary’s talks, Part I at [www.sethesvelt.com](http://www.sethesvelt.com))). At this time, her adoptive parents both died, and to support herself she was able to hold a pen and sketch pictures. But before long her body was totally deformed, so deformed that she was described as looking like a twisted pretzel. She had a dear friend who transcribed for her (Annie wrote over 6000 hymns), but she also suddenly died. At that point, Annie asked someone to write down the words to the hymn above, which was forming in her mind. It is a remarkable story of hope and faith in the unfailing grace of God to sustain her.

Romans 5:3 - *We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character, hope.*

Even though I understand little that the Lord has allowed us to go through, even though we still grieve daily as we look into Seth’s face, even though life is hard and sometimes overwhelming and confusing, as Annie wrote, God gives more grace when the burdens grow greater. And He giveth, and He giveth and He giveth again. And we have the ability to “keep going on.”

~Mary

**July 2010**

**A Father's Perspective**

*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle . . .* (Job 7:6)

I'm sure that I'm not exaggerating when I say that those of us who have at least lived into the "middle-aged" years can relate to that verse! The years have truly seemed to have flown by, and both Mary and I will reach our sixtieth birthdays this summer. The discomforting realization that "time flies" was brought home to me once again, with vivid clarity, when our eldest daughter, Holly, recently flew up from her home in New Orleans for a visit, and our family gathered together one evening to view some old slides (remember those?). There the panorama of our lives, from our newly married years to the birth of our children and into their young adulthood (when digital photography finally took over), was reviewed within a few brief, nostalgic hours. I saw my daughters grow from cute and chubby toddlers to beautiful young women. Mary matured and grew ever more lovely with the passing years. As for me, well, . . !

Seth sat by me in his wheelchair as I fed the slides into the projector, and I wondered how much he was taking in. There he was, as a bald little baby with ears that stuck out, and I had nicknamed him "Yoda" for the obvious resemblance ("Barfy" was also frequently employed, again for obvious reasons). As a tow-headed three-year old he looked like a miniature Dutch boy. Fortunately, his ears no longer stuck out, and if they had been pointed he would have made a great elf. We moved on through the soccer league years, his teens and homeschooling, and into his early adulthood when he learned the craft of home building and was licensed in the State of Washington as "Esvelt General Construction." Later we looked at photos taken during his trip to Europe with his friend, Jesse, where he spent his 21st birthday in Paris while he and his buddy were both sick with food poisoning, apparently suffering the aftermath of seafood salad that they had consumed in Spain a few days earlier. And, finally, there were the pictures taken during his year at California Baptist University, and his "last" summer. A life encapsulated in 23 short years.

His activities these days are limited and, for the most part, routine. After reading the newspaper I usually walk into his room around 7:00am, greet him, and pull up the shades. He's usually awake, and within minutes I can tell if he's in a good mood (smiling at my lame attempts at humor) or more passive in nature, probably depending on how he feels physically. Sometimes he's more "with it" than at other times. I exercise his legs, toes, and feet, particularly mindful to stretch his feet and toes back to ward off the tendency to otherwise constrict and "drop." After devotions with Dad, the rest of the morning is spent with his mother providing a bed bath and other hygienic care, tube feeding, and a neighbor dropping by around 9:15 to help with arm and leg therapy. By 1:00 pm he is in the Quadriciser, a passive exercise machine that moves his legs in a bicycling pattern and raises his arms up and down, keeping his joints flexible. The afternoons are spent in his wheelchair (inside and outdoors, depending on the weather), and several times a week, prior to putting him down to bed, he is strapped onto a home-made tilt board that raises him to varying degrees of standing upright, good therapy for brain stimulation and keeping his leg bones strong. Bungee cords with handles, hung from the ceiling, give him the opportunity to move his arms at will.

It's not a very exciting life for our formerly adventurous son, to be sure, and (for us) the days fly by "swifter than a weaver's shuttle." Seth may well feel like he's been relegated to a very small, isolated corner of the world. But the Bible verse mentioned above is not the entire statement, where Job, in fact, declares, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle *and come to their end without hope."* How depressing—and how true for so many! Fortunately, we who possess a fuller revelation than Job and have come to know the God Who is faithful to His word, through His Son, DO have a hope that sustains us. Whether still in this life, miraculously, or the next, Seth will be restored, conversations will yet be had, and memories will continue to be reviewed and constructed. In the meantime, sadness and joy co-mingle, but with the psalmist, we are able to say, *"Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you".* (Psalm 33:20-22)

Seth will turn 30 years old this July 11th—a milestone of sorts—and nearly seven years since his accident. He's certainly no longer the smiling youth who went away to college with dreams and ambitions, but I trust he remains part of a grand Master Plan whose purpose will ultimately unfold; otherwise, God would have surely taken him to his eternal home in those first hours after his accident when the doctors had given up all professional "hope" for his survival. We continue to be amazed at the growing number of "hits" on his web site, and still hear from (and are heartened by) folks we've never met who read it and are moved by his story. If any of you—his old friends, his former California friends, or web site acquaintances would like to encourage Seth on his 30th, drop him a line and share some thoughts or memories by emailing to "mesvelt@juno.com" and we'll read them to him on his birthday and may post some of them on his web site.

~Craig

**September 2010**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

Forty days and forty nights . . . that’s the difference between when I turned 60 and Craig turned 60 this summer! And right in the middle of that Seth had his 30th birthday. Thank you to so many of you who blessed both him and our family with birthday greetings. We spent a special evening reading and reminiscing about how you each have impacted our lives. I thought of 2 Corinthians where the apostle Paul wrote, “*We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure . . Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”*

As I’m reading through the birthday messages to Seth again (with a lump in my throat that doesn’t go away), I thought maybe others might be encouraged by a few excerpts, too:

“I will never forget your kindness to me during a very rough period in my life. Know that I love you, my friend, my brother in Christ.” (A fellow CBU student)

“I remember your smile. I always see you smiling. You were so joyful, full of light with a smile that reached your eyes and a grin with a hint of the mischievous! I look forward to catching up with you someday. And you will be whole. And I will be whole. Even though I don’t have the same needs as you, I am definitely in need of some healing as well. I anticipate that day when our hope will be realized.  *‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what the Lord has in store for those who love him.’*  Praise God that we have a future and a hope and that we will see it realized with our own eyes. That day is coming.” (A friend he grew up with)

“Through our times together, I’ve become more aware of the challenges in life I am not regularly confronted with. I’ve called out to God on your behalf and pray regularly for grace, joy and healing during these trying times. I genuinely look forward to the time when I can talk to you face-to-face and understand all that you are thinking and what God has spoken to you. I trust and hope that your conversations with our Savior have been a source of consolation and understanding. I remember your frankness in our talks and how you weren’t afraid to speak your mind. Whether in this life or the next, I anticipate those discussions again.” (A friend and mentor)

“Thanks for always challenging me to push the limits . . .You matter, you matter to me. You’ve impacted my life in ways that are profound and hard to articulate. I still pray for you.” (A friend he grew up with)

“Living for what makes you feel alive is one trait I really appreciate about you, Seth. Whether through music, friends, or work, you expressed God’s energy and joy. . . As I enjoy my life, rich with opportunities and pleasures, I feel inspired by you to play full out right now! I intend to exercise my faith in God and overcome tremendous obstacles. If I can do that with even half the stamina that you exert every day, I will live the most extraordinary life imaginable.” (A friend he grew up with)

For a birthday adventure, Craig and I decided to try a trip to Kennewick (3 ½ hours away) to visit Seth’s grandma and other family. We hadn’t done an overnighter before, but thought, why not? A hospital bed was rented and we stayed two nights. Seth seemed to enjoy the extra stimulation of seeing relatives and the whole experience was refreshing. Seth’s biggest health challenge during the summer was that he had two grand mal seizures. Even though it’s unnerving, we were able to stop them both at home with 20 mg of Valium, and were grateful we didn’t have to take him to the hospital. The specialist decided to put him on an additional medicine that will hopefully curtail the seizure activity.

For the first five years after Seth’s accident, his face was mostly expressionless, which was expected because brain injuries often affect the ability to express emotions. But several years ago, to our delight, he started smiling (usually at his dad’s antics). Now it’s a regular part of most days. This last year, though, he has also started grimacing, which is actually helpful, even though it breaks our hearts. Usually we can ask him if he has a headache and he blinks his eyes, so at least we can give him some Tylenol for the pain.

Another significant change in our family is that, after almost 12 years of ministry, Craig’s last day as the pastor of our church was on his 60th birthday. We loved our little church . . . they upheld, supported and encouraged us during our darkest days. There will never be anyone to take their place. But, since Seth’s care is so time consuming and the responsibility so great, we felt that we weren’t as effective in our ministry there as we would want to be. We’re not sure what the future holds, but we deeply desire “that our God may make us worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve (of ours) for good and every work of faith by His power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified” (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

~Mary

**December 2010**

**A Father’s Perspective**

Recently I’ve had the opportunity to share our story about Seth at three gatherings—two different worship services and a large luncheon. Typically included were some insights into Scripture and other lessons Mary and I have learned through our ordeal that we otherwise would never have realized. I titled one of my talks, “Don’t Use Ink In Your Day Planner,” a not-too-subtle reference to the uncertainty of life. A friend commented that I was showing my age, since people generally don't use day planners anymore with all the high-tech communication gadgets. The problem was, "Don't Use Ink On Your Smart Phone" wouldn't have had quite the same impact! The point is, God alone not only knows but directs the future as He wills and ultimately toward His ends, and we've learned to hold the precious things of this life loosely. How many who are middle-aged and above could honesty say that life turned out in all ways precisely as they had hoped?

Invariable, after sharing such a message, some individuals come up to me afterward to express their sympathy and, quite often, to thank me for providing them with a new perspective on trials and suffering or life in general, or who wish to relate their own personal story of struggles. I am grateful that our experience can provide comfort or encouragement to others but, frankly, I would never want to be so misleading as to say, “It was worth it all because of what it’s done for us and for others” No, I’d turn the clock back in a heartbeat if I could and have my “old” son back. Our hope and comfort is in knowing a sovereign God Who is the Grand Weaver, “whose thoughts are not my thoughts and whose ways are not like mine” (Isa. 55:8-9), Whose purposes will one day be clear and Who has promised that the “slight momentary afflictions” we endure this side of eternity will be gloriously compensated on the other (2 Cor. 4:17).

Seth will surely appreciate heaven, and he's likely looking forward to it even more than most. But what about now? We wonder how someone in his severely limited condition, who can't speak, is virtually immobile, and can't even partake of the simple pleasure of tasting food could possibly be enjoying NOW (he is fed through a stomach tube). Perhaps it's the back scratches, foot massages, books read to him, sports shows on TV and the like. For our formerly gregarious son, life must be pretty mundane when his daily social circle usually involves only Dad and Mom and a couple of care givers. We know that he likes it when we have company over, and seemingly enjoys the occasions that we are able to take him out to visit our friends or relatives. When we ask him afterwards if he was glad to be able to sit in on group activities and listen in on others' conversations, he will often respond with raised eyebrows or blinks. He evidently picks up more than we often give him credit for. Not long ago Mary and I were discussing an infection that Seth had somehow acquired, which we were treating with prescription drugs. Seth was sitting nearby in his wheelchair and seemed oblivious to us. When Mary commented to me that "He sure looks good for having an infection," Seth immediately lifted his eyebrows several times. That drew a laugh from me, and I said, "So, Seth, you think you're good-looking or something?" Another quick response of eyebrow-raising. Apparently, his sense of humor remains intact!

In an immediate sense, we're looking forward to December and the family being together again for Christmas. Our son-in-law, Matthew, has been offered a job with the Public Health Department in nearby Tacoma and is making the long drive up here from New Orleans this week. It is a temporary position, but with possibilities of permanent work, in which case Holly would be able to move up and they could settle in somewhere closer.

In a more far-reaching sense, I look forward to the time when the Grand Weaver's work will be completed, when we can play "catch up" with Seth and once again he'll be able to join in family conversations and make his sisters laugh as he so easily used to. In that day the threads of God's finished tapestry will be viewed from HIS vantage point with all of their marvelous, intricate patterns in thoughtful arrangements. I suspect that we'll be surprised at how the more difficult episodes of our life particularly added all the more color, richness and interest to the design. It was the great Christian thinker, C.S. Lewis, who suggested that some of the first words we'll utter as heaven opens for us and we glance back over the confusion and struggles of our earthly pilgrimage will be, *"Of course!"*

~Craig