**January 2011**

**Reflections from a Mother's Heart**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God* (2 Corinthians1:3-4).

This week I will be having a total shoulder replacement, my sixth joint replacement as a result of the rheumatoid arthritis I’ve lived with for 26 years. I’m certainly not looking forward to the surgery, hospital stay, recuperation, and consequent therapy, and I’m also reflecting on the fact that Craig will have all the responsibility for Seth’s care for about six weeks. Kind of a rocky start for 2011!

But, in the middle of this, the Lord is still revealing Himself as the “God of all comfort.” When the x-rays were examined a couple of months ago and it was determined that, indeed, my shoulder that had been replaced 14 years ago was unstable and disintegrating, the nurse commented that it was difficult to get a first-time appointment with the particular surgeon who is the shoulder specialist. To her surprise, when she opened the calendar, it revealed a consultation slot in only a week and a half!

A few days later I was glancing at the obituaries in the local paper, a habit I started after Seth’s accident. I look especially for young people who have passed away, and even though I don’t know them my heart aches along with their parents and family, and I pray. This particular morning I was shocked as my eyes rested on the photo of a beautiful 29 year old—the daughter of the very surgeon I was to meet with. It appeared she had passed away unexpectedly from complications of a chronic (though normally treatable) disease. Each day as I stared at her picture in the paper my heart grew heavier and heavier for the doctor over the loss of his precious daughter. The funeral was to be at the end of the week, and my appointment with him was on Monday morning.

I think I was the first patient after his return, because as I waited in the room to see him I could hear his associates welcoming him back to work. Then I met him for the first time and, of course, in a very professional manner the doctor explained what the procedure would entail and what to expect from it. I knew that beneath his doctor-mannered professionalism his parent-heart had to be breaking. When he got up to leave, I quietly commented that I had seen his daughter’s picture in the paper and was so, so sorry and, I added (even though my voice was getting pretty shaky and it was all I could do to hold back the tears), that perhaps I could understand a little of his grief because I had a son who was in a car accident and was left in a vegetative/minimally conscious condition. As he walked out, he politely thanked me and said the nurse would be right in. To my surprise, a minute later the door opened and—instead of the nurse—the doctor stepped back in. He simply said, “May I give you a hug?” And in that hug, we clung to each other, not as a doctor and patient, but as two parents who had experienced a deep loss, one whose grief was still very raw. It was such a poignant moment that, even months later as I reflect on it, tears well up in my eyes.

*“Grace alone, which God supplies. Strength alone, He will provide. Christ in us, our cornerstone. We will go forth in Christ alone.”* (Chorus to the song, “Grace Alone”)

~Mary

**May 2011**

**A Father's Perspective**

*O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.* - Psalm 51:15

This unusually cool, wet, and gray spring (even by Seattle standards) is making even many of the hard-core natives complain about the weather. The fact is, this is the coldest spring recorded here in the Puget Sound area for the past 120 years, keeping us natives (including my formerly sun-loving son) cooped up indoors and yearning for warmer temperatures. But, compared to the climatic trauma of tornadoes, flooding and drought that other parts of our country have been experiencing, it's tolerable!

Our spirits were not made any brighter by the number of medical crises early in the year. In January, Mary had shoulder replacement surgery, the second time on her right shoulder, and even today her recovery remains slow and painful. In February she, Seth and I all caught bad colds which turned into pneumonia for Mary and Seth and bronchitis for me. Seth, due to scarring from the severe trauma he sustained to his lungs in the accident years ago and normally shallow breathing caused by his relative immobility, always gets hit the hardest with such illnesses, and his coughing made for several weeks of sleepless nights for all of us. The typically pained expression on his face whenever he coughs was, we figured, natural after so many days of hard coughing. Medications were prescribed, and the storm finally subsided. The relative calm, however, was broken by a grand mal seizure Seth experienced before the month was over. Fortunately, it was brought under control at home with some Valium. Then, on the third of March, Seth began to move his right arm in a more exaggerated fashion. At first we were encouraged, as we have been with any new movements. But the arm began to swing more wildly toward the evening, his skin became cold and clammy, and we began to realize he was stressed about something.

One of the most difficult aspects of caring for our son is that he cannot communicate well enough to tell us what or where he hurts. That frustration is surely felt more keenly by Seth himself. One night as I was preparing to turn off his light, as I wistfully shared how much I miss conversing with him, I offered that it must be so very hard being locked in a body that cannot respond. Seth immediately (and unsolicited) raised his eyebrows. I then said, "Even after all this time, it must be frustrating, right?" And he raised his eyebrows again.

In the case above, where he appeared stressed, a dose of Valium failed to settle him down, and in a middle-of-the-night phone call his doctor recommended we take him into the hospital emergency in the morning if his condition hadn't improved. His neurologist suspected it might be a new form of seizure (not good news) but that was ruled out and scans to his head and abdomen eventually revealed two possible sources of pain: a bad sinus infection, probably the aftermath of his recent upper respiratory tract infection, but even more likely the presence of some small kidney stones were a strong indication that he had been passing a larger one. I have (thankfully) never had a kidney stone, but I've known men who have and they will tell you it is the most severe pain they've ever experienced. Poor Seth! The scan to his chest also turned up another unexpected thing: his doctor informed us that two of his ribs that were broken in the accident seven and a half years ago evidently never healed back together properly, and when he coughs the unattached rib ends tend to rub against each other, causing him understandable discomfort (and, hence, the persistent pained expressions). He was scarcely back home from the hospital when Seth went into another seizure one evening which, gladly, was again brought under control with Valium. About this time we were feeling a bit overdue for a break.

A happier note was finally heard in April when our son-in-law Matthew was awarded a permanent position with the Pierce County Health Department in nearby Tacoma, and he and our daughter Holly will be moving their things up from New Orleans (where they've lived for the past four and a half years) in June. Matthew's former experience as an ICU nurse gives him the necessary skills to care for all of Seth's physical and medical needs and will afford Mary and I the opportunity to get away from our usual home-bound responsibilities from time to time, for a couple of days, since he and Holly have offered to stay here on occasions to give us a respite. It is comforting to know that, with his background in nursing, Matthew can read subtle signs in Seth's expressions and movements that clue him in to possible problems, signs Mary and I have learned to read as well. Again, if Seth could only speak, life would be so much easier for us and a resolve for the frustration he undoubtedly struggles with day to day.

Yet we know it's only a matter of time and place. When Fannie Crosby, the great hymn writer of the 19th century, was pitied by a friend for her lifelong blindness, she responded, "Don't you realize that the first face I shall ever see shall be His?!" So too, barring a miracle this side of heaven, His will be the first ears to hear Seth's voice again, and as the chains he's borne in this life finally fall away I'd love to hear what he has to say!

~Craig

**July 2011**

**Reflections from a Mother’s Heart**

I’m thinking a lot about heaven today, probably because my own mother stepped over into eternity a few hours ago. For several years she has had to endure increasing hardships from Alzheimer’s as her fragile body also slowly slipped away. I don’t know if she realized who the three of us sisters were. She possibly thought of us as the nice ladies helping to take care of her, feeding her, holding her hand, hugging her and telling her they loved her. A lifelong believer, she had prayed during our childhood that each of her daughters would have Christian husbands and had then had the joy of seeing all three of her future sons-in-law come to faith in Jesus Christ. As I reflect on how difficult her last years had become, I am rejoicing for her now as she is enjoying the glories of heaven with the Savior she loved. I like how Beth Moore, an author and Bible teacher, so aptly describes death: “In a metaphorical sense, someday we’ll simply unzip our physical bodies and walk free of their encumbrance and in perfect health and vitality step straight into the lives we were meant to live.”

And that is the future I picture for Seth, too. Someday, when he sheds the shackles that bind him now, he won’t be hindered anymore by a body that doesn’t respond and a mouth that doesn’t speak. He won’t suffer with things like pneumonia, like he did earlier this month because of his damaged lungs and spend weeks continually coughing and gagging. Some time ago, Seth received a letter from Joni Eareckson Tada. You might be familiar with her story. Over 40 years ago as a teenager she broke her neck in a diving accident and, like Seth, in one second her life and her future were totally altered. Joni has led an incredible life as a quadriplegic, starting a world-wide ministry to those with disabilities (www.joniandfriends.org), as well as being a successful artist (she paints holding a brush with her mouth), writer and speaker, sharing the platform with people such as Billy Graham. Yet she is gracious enough to take the time to send a letter of encouragement to an obscure, hurting family and a severely brain-injured young man in Renton, Washington. Here is part of her letter to Seth:

*I know one thing; I can’t wait to meet you in heaven. Philippians 3:21 describes how we eagerly await our Savior, the Lord Jesus, who one day will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body. That’s a promise, Seth. And so let’s make a date: let’s either play a game of tennis, throw around a football, or maybe we can just dance together. Whatever it is, we’ll rejoice that Jesus rescued us from this old world with all its pain and problems and translated us into His glorious kingdom!*

I don’t know a lot about heaven, but I do know that I Corinthians 2:9 says, “*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.”* Looking back, His love reached out for us at the cross. Looking ahead, the Scripture also promises that God will personally wipe away every tear (Revelation 7:17). For now, suffering and loss tend to loosen our grip on many things of this world, and much of what once seemed important to us has taken on a more trivial status.

I’m looking forward to heaven and seeing my mom again, whole, just as I’m sure Seth longs for that day as well. C.S. Lewis said it this way: “In heaven we will understand that life on earth was just the title page and now the real story begins!”

~Mary

**December 2011**

**A Father's Perspective**

*"Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine."* (Gen. 41:35-36)

What a pleasure it is to walk into Seth's room at this time of year and inhale the sweet fragrance of a noble fir, decked out with lights and other beautifully arranged ornaments. It is positioned so that Seth can view the colorful display when inclined on his bed. This Christmas season is all the more special in that Holly and Matthew have informed us that we will be grandparents—and Seth will be an uncle—come next August. And so, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we are also rejoicing at the beginnings of a new generation in our own family!

I recently determined that the generation encompassing our children's births and respective growths into adulthood should be preserved for them (and for Mary and myself) in a handy, single, pictorial display, rather than having to rummage through scatterings of obsolete 35mm slides and piles of old photographs. So, as a Christmas gift to our family, I scanned and digitalized the best of our family slides and photos from the time of Holly's birth until the year of Seth's accident—a timeline of 27 years—to recapture, as best as possible, their lives and ours on a CD of sequentially-dated pictures.

I tested the digital "slide show" on Seth, setting a laptop computer in front of him and allowing him to view the unfolding of the first 23 years of his life. His eyes do not dart around as much as they used to, and he seemed to focus intently on the pictures as they came and went. As usual, I wondered what he was thinking as he observed the panorama of his own life from infancy and childhood, then into the teen years and ultimately young adulthood, abruptly ending with the summer of his 23rd birthday. I regretted never having purchased a video camera when the kids were growing up that would have captured those personal things that a photograph cannot, e.g., his voice, his mannerisms, and just the way he carried himself. Fortunately, we do have a few video snippets from friends.

To me, these pictures are like an assortment of individual frames edited out of the film of an old movie reel, with so much of the story line in between being left to memory. Sadly, some of those "memory frames" gradually disappear and are lost in the relentless march of time, but the essential story of Seth's life remains intact for us; others who knew him will necessarily be content with shorter clips.

One thing that is noticeably apparent when viewing snapshots of his life is *change*—his growth, maturing, activities and the like—yet such significant change is noticeably and sadly absent in this present phase of Seth's life. Days, weeks, months, and now years are going by in a fairly predictable and seemingly mundane routine for us and especially for him. Nor do we anticipate much further change in Seth, barring a miracle. We are delighted that he continues to smile more and more often; in fact, some days he wakes up smiling and appears to be in a pleasant mood throughout the day, smiling at nearly everything we say, and we savor those times. On other days he may do nothing but sleep.

At the close of each year Mary and I always wonder what the next year will hold for us and for Seth. Perhaps, like this past year, it will be much of the same kind of predictable routine as before with occasional breaks, experienced as temporary crises (e.g., trips to the hospital for Seth) or occasions of joy, like Holly's announcement regarding our future grandchild.

We take comfort in the knowledge that our sovereign God holds the future in His hands and is working out His purposes for us and for Seth, and the best thing we can do with our limited understanding is cooperate with Him by faith through the good times and the hard times. How glad we are that our granary of faith was filled up, inch by inch, by years spent in daily readings of God's Word and fellowship with other dedicated believers, not realizing during those abundant times that a significant depletion lay ahead. As a new year approaches and unknown times lie ahead, may each of us purpose to add to our reservoirs of faith.

*"The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands"* (Psalm 138:8)

~Craig