**January 2013**

**Update from Craig**

*“When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow will not overflow; For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.”* (old Christian hymn)

People continually ask how I am doing since Mary’s eternal home going. The loss of my beloved wife, compared to—in a manner of speaking—that of Seth, by virtue of his traumatic brain injury over nine years ago, has impacted me differently. Even though we did not deal with an actual, physical death with regard to our son, the grief I experienced after Seth’s accident has been of a sharper, more devastating kind of pain, for it not only entails a loss of companionship with the son I had known but the horrible realization that (for him) life as he had known it was effectively over at age 23, that he would never experience so much of the good things it had to offer. His was a life cut prematurely short, one of so much potential unrealized and dreams unfulfilled. Mary, on the other hand, ran the course of her life very well, having enriched more people’s lives in a very positive way than most women who live well beyond the 62 years that was given her (and I think those who knew her well would agree). I loved her more deeply than anyone this side of heaven and I certainly miss her presence and grieve the loss of her companionship, her encouragement, and so many other ways she blessed my life, but she first of all belonged to her Savior and I accept that she was “on loan” to me from the Lord. Part of the way I deal with the grief of her absence is in purposing to thank God for the 40 great years He gave us rather than succumbing to resentment for the loss of the 20 or so years I presumed I still had coming to us. The assurance that she is very much alive in a very real place that transcends anything this earth has to offer—and that we will be reunited someday—is truly a wonderful benefit of my faith in Jesus Christ, a great source of comfort. To put it another way, I grieve OVERMary (my loss, my pain), but not FOR her (since she is better off now), whereas I have grieved both over Seth AND forhim. Surely the prayers of so many of our friends have, as well, cushioned the blow my family has been dealt, and for that I am grateful.

Aside from the predictable emotional ups and downs, life has also taken a turn so far as activities and responsibilities are concerned. Much of my days are now spent having to do what Mary did so well and what was too often taken for granted—doing the laundry, cooking, dishes, house cleaning, as well as the daily routines of Seth’s care, e.g., bathing, food preparation, adjusting his position, changing pads, getting him in and out of his passive exercise machine, and so forth. Although he cannot communicate in any meaningful fashion, I find that just having another person in the house is comforting; it would be more difficult to endure Mary’s absence if I had been left all alone in this house. Seth affords me another reason to get up each morning. The downside is being so utterly homebound; each time I need to leave home for various appointments, church, groceries, and any other necessary errands, I have to plan ahead and secure someone to be here with him, and even then for only a matter of hours. I am blessed by the friends who have stepped in to help. Such a restricted lifestyle is a far cry from the anticipated “empty nest” years Mary and I had envisioned together years ago. And who would have thought, at this stage of life, that I would be assuming the role of a “single parent”?!

Seth seems to be doing well, although he and I recently had a nasty virus to deal with despite our having had flu shots. He still smiles frequently and gratuitously at my lame attempts at humor, and is probably looking forward to sunnier days to come when he can spend more time outside on the patio. I regret that so much of his social life is now limited to the presence of only one parent; undoubtedly he misses his mom’s loving care and bright spirit. Visits with my six month-old grandson and Seth’s nephew are a welcome event; Andrew is a happy little fellow and we often sit him on Seth’s lap in the wheelchair.

My daughters and I have been supremely blessed by the response to the Mary Esvelt Well Fund, by which we intend to support the digging of wells to provide fresh water for Ethiopians and perhaps others as well. Donations have exceeded $30,000 so far, which far surpasses anything Mary envisioned in the month prior to her death when she asked us as a family to begin collecting loose change in water bottles that would be cashed in at Christmas. She who refreshed so many spiritually in this life will continue to refresh others physically though she now resides in heaven! Donations can be made to: Valley View Christian Church, at 25605 124th Ave. SE, Kent, WA 98030, to make her influence ongoing.

If you haven’t yet viewed the 9-minute video of Mary’s life and snippets of her teaching that was shown at her memorial service, you can click on to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGuxr\_UxByQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGuxr_UxByQ)

~Craig

**May 2013**

**Update from Craig**

*“Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”* (Psalm 90:12)

It was just a year ago this month that my family’s life was turned on its head, so to speak, with a second major upheaval. The first one occurred nearly ten years ago, in August of 2003, when Seth suffered a near-fatal car accident that left him in a severely and permanently disabled condition with a brain injury. Then a year ago Mary was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor, suffered through a major brain surgery, radiation and chemo treatments, and finally succumbed in October. The sadness and sense of great loss goes on, tempered by the grace of God, Who “comforts us in all our affliction.”

I am heartened by the fact that Mary’s influence continues on in several ways. First of all are the kind words of friends and acquaintances who have shared how her life impacted their own lives by her godly example and practical counsel. Happily, this will not necessarily cease. A few months ago I was looking through some old boxes of cassettes and found a ten-week series of Sunday lessons she taught the ladies at a former church entitled, “Teach Us to Number Our Days,” one of her favorite Bible verses and a statement that well-expresses the intentionality of her life—informative messages on various biblical disciplines, of being a wife and mother, and ministries that were drawn from her own life experiences. Having not attended that class myself, I was impressed with the practicality of it all and was blessed by being reminded of many scenarios from our family’s past. I’ve transferred them to CD’s in hopes of perpetuating her teaching ministry and am pleased to hear that a former church will use them at a women’s retreat next fall.

Finally, the balance of the donations from Mary’s well fund (over $32,000) have been sent to Charity:Water—an organization that installs water wells in areas of Africa that desperately need clean water (most of the diseases in that nation stem from impure water). With the monies we provided, two deep bore wells will be installed in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia, one being a community well and the other a well and other sanitary facilities for a school. From start to finish the projects will take about 18 months; information on the progress of each well will be provided from time to time and ultimately a GPS coordinate will be assigned on each well and their respective sites can be viewed at [www.charitywater.org](http://www.charitywater.org). Also, a bronze plaque in Mary’s name will be installed at each well. Hopefully, at some time in the future my son-in-law, Matthew, who served as a nurse in Ethiopia a few years back, will be able to view these wells with our grandson, Andrew (a fitting tribute to his grandmother).

Charity:Water informed me that an anonymous donor has offered to match any funds for work in that area at this time, so an additional community well and school project will be provided beyond that sponsored by Mary’s well fund—four deep well projects total, all because of a desire Mary had last fall for our family to collect loose change up until Christmas and donate the proceeds to some charitable organization for digging a well somewhere in Africa! Not only so, my youngest daughter, Kirsten, organized a combined birthday party for her and friends last week that raised over $2,000 for another Charity:Water project.

Otherwise, Seth seems to be doing well. With warmer weather on the horizon he will be able to sit outside and enjoy the sunshine he loved in former years. He remains remarkably fit for one in his situation, with daily routines in the Quadriciser, a passive exercise machine, and episodes on a tilt board that is designed to keep his leg bones strong and his feet properly straight and flexible. I am grateful for the friends who offer to come over and stay with him when I need to get out for errands and appointments.

~Craig

**June 10, 2013**

**Update from Craig**

*“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”* (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Years ago on this very day (June 10th) Mary and I stood side by side in her parents’ backyard overlooking a panorama of forested hills and rolling wheat fields and recited our wedding vows. She was absolutely stunning, we were both deeply in love, and we looked forward to spending our lives together. Today would have been our 41st anniversary.

Fairly early in our marriage Mary purchased a small journaling book with the idea of recording the events of each wedding anniversary. Realizing that we couldn’t even recall the way we had celebrated our first several anniversaries, she wanted both of us to write down, every June 10th, where we had gone to eat, movies we might have seen, or other places we had stayed for an overnighter or two. In addition to the events of that special day we also wrote a page or so reflecting on the previous year, specifically, the happenings that had made that year significant (both positive and negative) and which had a part in shaping our lives and adding to our treasure chest of memories. We were open and honest in sharing our feelings of joy, anticipation, and (most notably in 2003 with Seth’s accident) our disappointments and grief. That little blue book was one of the best investments we ever made, for such memories often otherwise fade to a few fleeting images or are lost altogether, and those pages became a source of enjoyment each year as we not only made our respective entries but would often read back, out loud together, over the many recollections of job changes, children’s milestones, trips and holidays, the physical challenges brought on by Mary’s rheumatoid arthritis, and so forth.

Our last anniversary in 2012 had only one entry, mine, since Mary was at a rehabilitation facility recovering from brain surgery and did not have the opportunity to write in the book. I had brought her home for a few hours that day, ordered lunch out so we could enjoy a good meal together, and then had taken her back to the rehab center. Later, I remembered the book and made my own entry, citing (as you might expect) the emotional highs and lows of the previous months. The year had begun with the multiple blessings of our eldest daughter’s pregnancy with the anticipation of our first grandchild, our younger daughter’s purchase of a home, and a new and seemingly ideal position for me on staff at a nearby church. Life had taken an upswing, and after some difficult years we were experiencing some renewed optimism, but then we were blindsided by the news of a malignant brain tumor in Mary on Mother’s Day. I ended my entry that day with the words, “So, this has been one of the hardest years ever, not unlike 2003 with Seth’s accident. What will the next year hold? Hopefully, . . . the Lord will give us many more years.”

Several weeks after Mary’s passing on October 31st I was taken with a bout of nostalgia and decided to retrieve the little book out of its drawer and read some of my precious wife’s words from years gone by. Imagine my surprise to discover she had made a final entry, unbeknownst to me, several weeks after our anniversary when she had finally returned home from the rehab facility! Now, months removed, I was brought to tears as I read a final communication from my beloved, who penned, *“There is no way I could love or respect Craig any more than I do at this moment in time. We have been hit hard and we’re still standing. His strength, drawn from the Lord over years of discipline, has held our family and lives together. I pray God gives us MANY more years to minister together and even the most fruitful would still be ahead.”*

Apparently, in the providence and perfect mind of God, He had other designs, and in His plan a blessed marriage and life were necessarily coming to completion. And ironically (if not fittingly), after pages and pages of the years of the chronicles of our lives, Mary’s final words that expressed her anticipation of the birth of our grandson—*“Can’t wait to meet Holly and Matthew’s little boy soon”—*completed the last line of the very last page of that little blue book! She could have written “The End,” but for her it was soon to be the beginning of something new and greater and more enduring.

Mary’s ashes were laid to rest on June 2nd at a little cemetery at Dartford, just north of Spokane, where my great-grandfather had settled in the 1890’s and where most of my clan is buried. At the small graveside gathering I read the words of an 18th century Italian priest, Ugo Bassi, which seem to sum up her life quite well:

*“Measure thy life by loss and not by gain;*

*Not by the wine drunk but by the wine poured forth.*

*For love’s strength standeth in love’s sacrifice*

*And he who suffereth most has most to give.”*

~Craig

**October 31, 2013**

**Update from Craig**

*Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.* (Isaiah 49:13)

Exactly one year has transpired since the Lord called my dear Mary to her eternal home. Frankly, I’ve been looking forward to getting past this particular day, because throughout the past year I have found myself frequently wondering, “What were WE doing exactly one year ago on this very date?” and I would often thumb through my last year’s calendar or Mary’s old appointment book to see what we may have been doing on that day. I tried to relive in my mind what that particular experience was like, a clinging attempt to maintain some kind of connection. Just as I had feared the inevitable loss of memories of the ordinary times and conversations I had spent with Seth during the 23 years we had connected as father and son prior to his brain injury, so also do I presently dread the toll that time will surely take on many of the little, day to day remembrances of the wonderful woman who blessed and nourished so much of my life.

Seth is doing well, having had (to my knowledge) only one seizure in the past year which was quickly brought under control with medication I am able to administer. I’m always a bit apprehensive about being away from him when I am working in the yard or taking the dog for a walk. Whenever I have to leave home for errands and appointments I must rely on care givers to be here to stay with him in case of such an emergency. Sometimes they are friends who have volunteered to help and a couple of others are paid by the hour by a care-giving organization that receives a portion of the monthly allotment of hours I receive from the Department of Social and Health Services. The rest of those hours now take up most of my time and make up much of my own income. How could I ever have imagined that my son would be (passively) supporting me at this time of life?

I am fortunate that both of my daughters live close by and Seth and I are able to make frequent visits to their homes (my grandson is a special attraction), or they are able to drop by our place. Holly and Kirsten are both far better cooks than I am, a skill passed down from their mother. Kirsten, in fact, drops by most every Thursday evening to cook a meal for us and beat me at Scrabble. I know that Seth also enjoys my hosting other couples over for a meal and listening in on our conversations (I do remarkably well with Papa Murphy’s pizzas!). A couple of weeks ago I took him for an outing to a nearby walking trail (I push and he rides in the wheelchair) and we stopped on an old railroad trestle to watch the red backs of the salmon spawning in the Cedar River below.

It’s hard to know how he has coped with the loss of his mother. I’m sure he misses her cheerful voice and her bustling about and must resign himself to listening to the radio or stereo or watching TV while his dad is necessarily preoccupied elsewhere. For my part, each day is taken one at a time. For the past year and a half, since the day we discovered Mary’s tumor on May 13, 2012, I have dropped into bed each night and prayed the same three things: “Lord, I trust in Your unfailing love” . . . “Lord, *help me* to (continue to) trust in Your unfailing love” . . . “Lord, *show me* Your unfailing love.” And He has been faithful. Ten years ago, just a couple of months after Seth’s accident and on this very day of October 31st, I highlighted a paragraph from Oswald Chamber’s My Utmost for His Highest, which read: *“Faith by its very nature must be tried, and the real trial of faith is not that we find it difficult to trust God, but that God’s character has to be cleared in our own minds. Faith in its actual working out has to go through spells of unsyllabled isolation. Never confound the trial of faith with the ordinary discipline of life; much that we call the trial of faith is the inevitable result of being alive. Faith in the Bible is faith in God against everything that contradicts Him–I will remain true to God’s character whatever He may do. ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him’–this is the most sublime utterance of faith in the whole of the Bible.”*

~Craig