THE WHINER’S GUIDE TO CHEMOTHERAPY

by Judy Ragsdale

Illustrated by Nancy Hines
For my Shepherd

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Foreword

I did make it! I’m 68!!! The exclamation points are because I didn’t think I would see 50. God is so awesome! God would be awesome even if I had not seen 50, but it is amazing how He has made my cancers, my griefs, all my “events” turn out for good—both mine and His. It feels great to feel great! Thank You, God.

As I said, I am 68. I am awed and delighted to be alive and married to my high school sweetheart, John Ragsdale. I am awed and delighted to be the mother of Mark, Jane, Nancy, and Wade, and the grandmother of Kristen, Matthew, David Meredith, Kayla, Chris, Hannah, Robert, and Vincent.

I was a pretty typical stay-at-home Christian wife and mother—Lots of Bible teaching, P.T.A., volunteer work, etc. My first husband, Dave Hines, was a career Marine, so we lived all over the United States and had a great 43 years together.

My breast cancer (carcinoma) was diagnosed in July, 1986. After a mastectomy, at which time malignant lymph nodes were discovered, I went through fifteen months of chemotherapy. Actually, it took fifteen months of therapy to accumulate nine months of treatments. I have not had a recurrence of the breast cancer, and I am thankful for that. In 1993 and 1994 I had surgeries for unrelated cancer of the vulva (invasive squamous cell carcinoma)—another “not my favorite time of life!” It is now 2006, and I am now doing great!

I had not thought to write about the experience. I kept a journal during the treatments for my own therapy. But I felt so shepherded throughout the whole time, in spite of my shilly-shallying around. I wanted to share that.

Since the first printing of this book, Dave died of lung cancer. Some details of that can be found in the section called “The Rest of the Story.”

Please hang in there! Hang on to the Lord and just see what He does!

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly perils, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many (2 Corinthians 1:8-11)
Been There—Done That!
(Tips From One Who's Been There)
Quality Whining
-To Whom, When, and Where-

Let's face it, people, these next few months will never win your "My Favorite Period of my Life" Award. The best you can hope for is to get through it with ...hmm...perhaps just to get through it will suffice. A modicum of humor can be achieved through whining. We are not talking run of the mill griping here. We are talking Quality Whining. A few ground rules:

1. Pacifiers look peculiar in an adult mouth but considering what they do for babies, you might want to hide in your closet and go for it.

2. Try not to whine to your husband during the Super Bowl, NBA Finals, or the World Series. Otherwise consider him fair game. He did say "for better or worse," didn't he? If your wife is the whinee, the same applies to Oprah, a Good Book, and possibly the Super Bowl, the NBA Finals and the World Series. We live in a changing world.

3. Some of your finest whining can be done with others who are undergoing these Gestapo devised treatments. In fact you can hear six part harmony in an oncologist's office—particularly if there is a delicatessen downstairs.

4. Do your whining in small increments. The tolerance level for whining, even among those most sympathetic, will never approach your maximum ability to whine. I'd put it at about the same as your tolerance level when listening to a six-year-old detail the plot of a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle movie. So move right along when whining to friends.

5. Alone is good. You don't have to worry about looks, noise, content, or time.

6. The best whining is done to God. Not only can He help, He loves you best. And, let's face it, He has—you should pardon the expression—all the time in the world.
GESTAPO VICTIMS' CHOIR
Hair Today and
Gone Tomorrow

You may think you are ready for this but, trust me, you are not. All really is vanity! If you still have hair, put down this book and dash out and get a wig while you have something to match. Ground rules here:

1. If you're going the denial route, try not to look in the mirror till your wig is on. Even askew, it helps keep denial a viable option.

2. If you're going the fantasy route, the girl in Star Trek is a good role model. You can combine fantasy and denial here by forgetting your face and weight.

3. If you're going the realistic route, the basin is a good place to cry — saves Kleenex.

4. A multi-colored wig is good for some laughs.

5. Do not — repeat not — expect your wig to stay comfortable all day, but try not to actually throw it at the family when you have had it.

6. God really does look on the inside and it's quite possible you look more beautiful to Him than you ever have before.
Decisions! Decisions!
Bones Versus Bulge

Do you think you will get intriguingly skeletal on your chemotherapy? Don’t count on it. It’s a possibility, of course, perhaps even a probability, but some of us gained thirty or more pounds on the stuff. Ground rules here:

1. If it looks like your body is going the bulge route, try to think positively. When else can you do guilt-free eating regardless of what your scale reads?

2. If it looks like your body is going the bones route, try to think positively. Seldom are we blessed to have whipping cream and the like thrust upon us by the gallon.

3. If you can afford it, an escalating (or de-escalating) wardrobe is nice. Gobs of fat and bags of bones both look better in clothes that fit.

4. Try not to physically harm persons who rush up to you and say, “You’re gaining (losing) weight!” Saying, “No duh!” is acceptable though they won’t understand you if they have no teenage children. Spitting in faces is unacceptable no matter how ill you are.

5. As with the hair, God does look on the inside and values every bone (bulge) in (on) your body.
Flashes in the Night (and Day)

Ah yes, the chemical change. Menopause is the pits at any age and it hardly seems fair to add it to cancer. But we are not talking fair here, we’re talking cope. Ground rules here:

1. Most people do not know you are having a hot flash just by looking—particularly if you keep your clothes on.

2. These intense flashes do not last very long, but make up your mind that you’ll probably be very warm most of the time. Moving to the Arctic is an option most of us choose not to take.

3. Turning on the air-conditioning in January has a tendency to distress the family.

4. Remind yourself you are energy efficient as you save on heat all winter—provided you don’t turn on the air-conditioning.

5. You barely notice the intense heat of summer as it’s been with you all winter.

6. God can assist you here by helping you control the urge to strip in public as well as calm you until it passes.
This is a sickening subject to deal with—forgive me, I couldn't resist the pun. Ground rules here:

1. Bodies invariably object to large doses of poison, so try not to blame your body for screaming, "REJECT!"

2. As long as your head is not in the pot, this is a good day.

3. When your head is in the pot, be glad you have indoor plumbing.

4. Do not buy 40 cases of your current "nausea abater" (sunflower seeds, cheezits, plain crackers, etc.) as these things have a tendency to turn on you.

5. A serious hint: Plain lettuce and Extra peppermint gum stayed effective for me the whole time.

6. Association becomes important here. Try not to throw up on your oncologist if you see him socially.

7. Wearing a gas mask in restaurants is a possibility if you don't mind the stares, as smells seem more lethal than actual food.

8. If it's going to come up anyway, you might as well eat something you enjoy going down.

9. God has said "suffering in the body" helps us get our priorities right, so hang on to that even when you can't hang on to your supper.
Pity Parties for Pain—Catered and Uncatered

Pain is often an integral part of these treatments—as in joint, heart, mouth—you name it, it can hurt! But the Quality Whiner does not despair. The Quality Whiner can cope. Ground rules here:

1. Reading multiple books on the side effects of drugs is a mixed bag depending on whether you are a placebo reactor.

2. If you are a placebo reactor, you will doubtless suffer side effects of all kinds.

3. If you don’t read the side effects, you can blame everything on chemotherapy. My husband had to remind me that I was quite often tired B.C. (Before Chemotherapy).

4. No matter how bad your chest pains are, don’t expect to get to skip a treatment. Chances are your only respite will come from a low white blood count.

5. Limping is permissible when joint pain is significant. Corollary: Joint pain is likely to be significant. Tylenol is a boon here.

6. “Blisters in your mouth mean the chemotherapy is doing its job.” It is understandable but inadvisable to want to deck your doctor for making this remark. Remember, his are the hands that wield the needle.

7. Get together with other chemotherapy patients and tell sick jokes. Laughter makes your endorphins work.

8. Learning experiences are generally the pits, but God will help you learn from this if you’ll let Him.
Deep Down, Way, Way Down

It is important to recognize that depression may be a factor in how you feel—especially toward the end of your treatments when you think you can’t stand to have a single treatment more. There’s the natural depression that comes from being scared to death of our own mortality. And some of these fun little drugs cause depression in addition to their other duties. Oh great! Ground rules here:

1. Depression is not a “social disease”—it’s perfectly okay and, indeed, a good idea to say “Whoa! Am I on a downer today!” The Help! Help! Approach.

2. Stay busy—if your fatigue (see next chapter) will let you. The I Don’t Have Time to Give In Approach.

3. Read funny books—make that, read amusing books, as opposed to Batman. The Laughing Through My Tears Approach.

4. If you can bear to hear those cliches—a silver lining, darkest before the dawn, etc.—remember they became cliches because they are true. The I Know! I Know! Approach.

5. Lie down, assume the prenatal position and suck your thumb. The I Give In Approach.

6. Walk as far as your fatigue will let you. It really does help. The I Think I Can Approach.

7. Jesus was depressed and scared in the garden of Gethsemane so He really knows where you’re coming from. Talk to Him!
Fatigue

I have great respect for my oncologist who did not fall off his stool laughing when I asked if I could continue my daily four-mile walk. He did suggest that I might take a nap afterward or cut it down some. But I found it hard to nap before, during, and after which is what I felt like! Ground rules:

1. Congratulate yourself that you are finding new word meanings—tired, exhausted, weary, etc.

2. Find new ways to express the above feelings. At least your mind is exercising.

3. When you feel that solid wall of fatigue coming, try to find a place to lie down that won't stain your clothes. Rule out the kitchen floor if you have preschoolers.

4. Those relaxation techniques work pretty well when your body is wiped out and mind is still jumping. Hurrying through your relaxation techniques minimizes the effects.

5. When you are too wiped out to pray, it is wonderful to know God's Holy Spirit is taking over and praying for you.
WHEN YOU FEEL A SOLID WALL OF FATIGUE COMING...
AND A PLACE TO LIE DOWN THAT WON'T STAIN YOUR CLOTHES.
Water, Water Everywhere

Consider yourself a walking violation of the Environmental Protection Agency. If your body were the United States, they’d be on you like a ton of bricks. Ground rules:

1. Everything you are putting into your body is “user unfriendly.” So, drink, drink, drink—water!

2. Consider yourself an overused toilet and flush, flush, flush—with water!

3. That sloshing sound you hear as you walk is good—it means you’re (maybe) getting enough, you guessed it, water!

4. It’s hard to make a half gallon container look cute—paint pens can be fun.

5. Never pass up a drinking fountain without imbibing. Corollary: Be sure to mark the locations of strategically placed restrooms.

6. God did a grand job on H$_2$O! It’s amazing what a help it is!
Paranoia

An unavoidable syndrome of the Big C, this can be greatly alleviated by some Quality Whining. Ground rules:

1. Whoever said “the greatest thing we have to fear is fear itself” had never had cancer.
2. Show your surgeon every lump. Disregard his resigned look—it’s not his lump!
3. Remember you probably had some oddball lumps before your malignancy.
4. Also remember most lumps are harmless. Do not snarl at your surgeon when he reminds you of this.
5. Every physiological malfunction is not cancer, but it will only cost you the price of an office visit to have an official tell you that. Sometimes it’s worth it.
6. It’s hard to decide whether it’s preferable for your friends to laugh at your fears or panic with you. But misery does seem to love company, so share your fears with someone—preferably someone you know. People on the bus have a marked tendency to get embarrassed.
7. A good verse to memorize for your paranoia periods is Psalm 34:4—“I sought the Lord and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears.”
The Journal and Prayers
(The Real Me)

Glossary of Folks:

Dr. Larson—my oncologist, Houston, Texas
Cindy—one of the young married at our church
Beth—another one of the young married at our church
Dave—my husband
Dr. Monday—my surgeon, Huntsville, Texas
Nan—my youngest daughter, in college at this writing
Wade—my youngest son, in college at this writing
Bevo Shockey—a young, single friend from church
Jane—my oldest daughter
Jean Brown—a dear church friend who also had breast cancer
Blake—young friend severely handicapped both physically and mentally
Nan (#2)—my first cousin, lives in Washington, D.C.
Aunt Sister—my aunt, 86 at this writing
Aunt Billie—my great aunt, 90 at this writing
Betty Nelson—a friend at church
True—Esther’s husband
Ophelia—a dear elderly friend in nursing home
Jeff Goad—a teenaged neighbor with brain cancer for the second time
St. Joseph's—hospital in Houston
Sarah—my aunt, owner of much mentioned "farm"
Bergstrom—Air Force Base, Austin, Texas
Mark—a dear church friend who owns Mark's Pharmacy, not to be confused with my oldest son Mark
Treby Bruning—nurse in ER, Huntsville, gave me chemotherapy treatments
Letha—dear church friend who died of cancer several years before I got it
Peggy—dear church friend, Arlington, Virginia
Marvin—church friend with cancer
Ellen—Jeff Goad's mother
Carol—mother of severely brain-damaged teen friend Bucky Gammill
Shirley—my husband's secretary
Iva Jean—dear church friend
Jeanine Dooley—acquaintance who lost all three children within two years
Lord,
It's hard to share an experience in which
  I'm not much of an example.
It really is
But I feel You pushing me.
Do I have to come out from behind
  my semi-serene façade?
Do I have to let people know I whine
  and suck my thumb?
Guess so,
If I want any peace.
Please,
Help this...journey?...exposé?
Draw someone
  anyone
Closer to You.

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 Corinthians 1:3-4).

August 26, 1986

Well, yesterday it began—really began weeks ago when chemo
first came up. So horrified to think I might have to. So sure there
was a better way. I still am sure there's a better way, but I guess it's
not for me to find. I like Dr. Larson. He's not defensive or threat-
ened by questions. He seems to think that as an individual I'll have
a say in continuation. Of course, he is adamant about a minimum
of six months. If I gainsay that, he might be less easygoing. I'm
afraid of weekly i.v.'s—not the needle so much as my poor veins,
but I'll trust God for that—as I'm trusting Him for the whole she-
bang. My stomach is pretty tense about it, but I slept better last
night than I have for weeks. I feel like God has led me to this man,
and I can handle this treatment better than I could have the other.
And grateful I don't have to start till after the wedding—though I
have a make-do wig just in case! (My insurance policy, I guess.)

Hear my prayer, O Lord; listen to my cry for mercy. In the
day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me
(Psalms 86:6-7).
September 7, 1986

Two treatments done! Yea! Am amazed at how well I feel. Amazed and grateful! Why do I not really believe until You show me? The scans don’t hurt though radioactivity within me is sobering. The injections don’t hurt – just a little tingling in forearm and hand. So grateful! A little queasiness—easily handleable by stuffing myself. Gained a pound this week. After fifty-two weeks, will I be fifty-two pounds heavier? Yuck! A lot of heartburn – Gelusil helps. Dr. Larson prescribed Tagamet to also help. Achy/piercy bones scared me, but they are “normal” for this and he said Tylenol is fine. So I remain very comfortable and very grateful! Several people in office so much worse off than myself. God, help them, comfort them.

When I said, ‘My foot is slipping,’ your love, O Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul (Psalm 94:18-19).

September 10, 1986

Have no idea what time it is—assume 4 or 5 a.m. As Bill Cosby said, “Bring it up to the back of her throat – now – make her burp.” No use lying there. Did my relaxing, some leg lifts, some imagery, some praying. Thank You so much I’m doing so well! Thank You! These are the hours I feel I really may die, and so far I can accept it with even some eagerness. Just help me know You. Help me know the reality is so much more than this shadow. But don’t let me cop out on duties here. Help me find folks—and time to serve You. Thank You for finding Dr. Larson. I don’t want to be preoccupied with me.

For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far (Philippians 1:19-23.)
Dearest Lord
Love of my life,
What might You do
If I could just
Let go of me?
Don’t let me be
Replete with me.
Please,
Open my heart
To You.

Should I rope Cindy in this morning – or Beth? Dave slept in the girls’ room last night because of his cold. I hated it at first because of the loneliness, but it does make for guilt-free night prowling. And I couldn’t do this if he were in here. Still, I’d rather have him by me. Maybe I could go the girls’ room for early morning stuff. “That’s the ticket!”

September 13, 1986

Woke about 3 a.m. with Big Time Chest Pains. Scary. Lasted longer than any I’ve ever had—not as severe as some when Mama was ill. Still scary. Decided to get up and read side effects in Bruning book. Thank God for that book! [Coping with Chemotherapy, Nancy Bruning, Ballentine Books, New York] Seems pretty matter of fact. Tough! They probably won’t take you off whatever it is even if it is heart. Am glad I decided to go on to Austin and see the kids! This insomnia is interesting. Just wake up and sleep’s over. Makes a great prayer/study time. I need to tend to “life and doctrine” more. I do reasonably well by life but not by doctrine. A little slipshod there—for one thing, I’m not so sure there is all that much doctrine—scuse me, Paul. I’m getting sleepy again so think I’ll go back to bed.

On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me (Psalm 63:6-8).
Do You want me now, Lord?
Have You something special You mean for me to do?
Almost like my new name…
My new job?
I wouldn’t want to cling to life in that case.
Don’t let my normal feelings
interfere with Your plans.
Let my family see that too.
And, If I must suffer here
To learn the obedience I need for there,
Help me do it gallantly.
Help me feel You at my side,
Borrow Your gallantry,
Not whine,
Love everyone I touch.

September 17, 1986

This prednisone is really making me crazy! Euphoric—not really altogether. Today in Dr. Monday’s office I made little or no sense. Hurt my pride to come off such a loony tune. Oh well, the important thing is I’m feeling right about Dr. Larson. It’s midnight or so and I’ve been cleaning up Nan’s room. Did Wade’s about 4 a.m. yesterday. If I stay on this stuff long enough, I may get a lot done. God is good to me. Win or lose, live or die, I’ve had so much more blessing than I’ve ever deserved. Thank You!

I was pushed back and about to fall, but the Lord helped me.
The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation (Psalm 118:13-14).

September 26, 1986

A little down tonight. Maybe because more hair seems to be coming out every time I brush. Thought it wouldn’t matter—life so much more important than vanity and all that—but maybe underneath it does. Have to work on underneath, Lord. Here in Dallas while Dave is on retreat. Help him have a wonderful, uplifting time. Bevo Shockey’s cancer a shock to me. Good lunch and visit with her and Jane. So young, so brave-young-thingish. How can I help? Thank You that she’s coming to the reunion. Want to be a light about this. Jane is so happy. Thank You!
Well, Father
I am really on a “downer.”
I know it.
I hate it.
But I can’t seem to let go of it.
Help me, please.
If You were tempted, Lord,
As I am,
You must have known “downers” too.
But You learned to shake it off,
To look Up.
Somehow that’s very sweet to know.
It helps me look Up too.
Thank You, Jesus.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-2).

October 20, 1986

Mama’s birthday. I miss her.
Couldn’t take a treatment today because my white count is down. Sobering. It will be nice to have a vacation from the poisons but sobering to be having trouble with them so early. Have decided I’d better be more serious about nutrition. Called Jean Brown and she sweetly called her nutritionist who goes overboard in my opinion. He suggested liver pills. I’ll look into it. Also mega Vitamin C. I’ll probably do moderate. No wonder I felt so washed out all week. Still, as long as my head is not in the pot, I’m grateful! And grateful for forty-nine terrific years!

By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?” My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?” Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?” Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God (Psalm 42:8-11).
November 1, 1986


What a gorgeous, gorgeous day!
How will I bear the beauty of heaven?
This tugs at my heart,
Aches in my throat.
Just this preview,
This crisp, glorious autumn day.
Thank You for these glimpses we get
Along the way.
I can hardly wait to see the real thing!

This is one of those days I feel like I won’t make it. Probably biorhythms! Probably need to do some imagery. Harder to image my white cells coming in great waves to my rescue when I know they’re down. About to go see Blake. He makes cancer a blessing! Don’t forget that, Judy!

Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. 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 (Psalm 71:19-20).

Oh, Father,
What would I do without You?
Thank You!
Thank You for caring about me,
For guiding me when I ask,
For leading me when I stray,
For loving me—
Always loving me.
What if I couldn’t come to You?
It’s too awful to contemplate!
Thank You for being there always
And wanting to share my life.
Right now it’s bad times
And I couldn’t make it without You.
I know You’re eager for
the good times too.
Thank You!
November 11, 1986

Well, the first treatment in three weeks yesterday. Glad I got to get started again. Dreaded it a little—rightly so—it’s going to make me sicker without the prednisone. Still not throwing up—thank You, God! Have gained eighteen pounds according to Dr. Larson’s scale. Depressing! According to mine early a.m. only twelve, which is bad enough! I’m scared to diet though. Although as queasy as I feel now, maybe I won’t have to. Help me be gallant, not gripey!

And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me (Psalm 50:15).

November 27, 1986

Tired today. Barely have the gusto to write this. Just hit all of a sudden.

I’m tired, Lord
Just bone weary.
So much to do I don’t know where to start.
You’ve been here.
You know.
Strengthen my heart.
I guess the first move has to come from me…
No…for so many years ago
You reached out.
The move was Yours
The strength is Yours
The love is Yours.
So
I can get up now
And go on,
Knowing it’s mine too,
Because of You.

The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you (Psalm 9:9-10).
Yesterday was nice at the farm. Good to see Nan again. Jane says I look like a baby bird without my wig. I like the image. Less ugly than I feel. You’re doing a job on my vanity for sure! Thank you (I think). Such a good visit with Aunt Sister and Aunt Billie in the car taking them home. Told about first cars in town and such. The man who owned the ice factory in Timpson had first car about 1911. Used to take all the kids, squeezed in like sardines, for rides. Aunt Billie was sixteen when they first got a car. Said cars ruined her dad and uncle’s country store business.

November 29, 1986

Felt better today. Having a great Thanksgiving weekend. Got very weak awhile last night, but it passed. Dave wanted to go to Walmart just to look but not without me. Honestly thought I wouldn’t make it, but we decided we’d go home when I needed to, and I lasted a lot longer than I thought I would. Guess spending money takes my mind off the weariness! Am doing leg lifts with Nancy now. I’m up to 150. She does 500 a.m. and 500 p.m. That girl has True Grit! Put up half the Christmas lights – Dave and Nan did. They look gorgeous! Had my last dose of Oncavin Monday. Yea! One milestone. I asked if it would make a difference in how I feel, but he said, “Sorry, the Cytoxin you take every day is the tough one.” Which makes me wonder why I drag more on Tuesday and Wednesday and have diarrhea on Wednesday usually. Weird!

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

November 30, 1986

Am so jumpy/glum today. Driving me cuckoo! Have felt more nauseated today than usual. Sunday is usually a fairly good day. Wonder if it’s psychosomatic knowing I’m going tomorrow?
Oh, Father,  
This is the pits!  
When will it be over?  
I feel desolate  
Wiped out  
guilty  
afraid  
I feel everything I hate to feel...  
A disappointment to him,  
A disappointment to You,  
A hopeless case.  
But wait—  
What would I feel if my child  
said all that to me?  
Anger? No!  
Disappointment? No!  
Harshness? No!  
An aching need to help!  
And I might not be able to help my child,  
But oh, You can! You can!  
Change my heart!  
Fill my mind with hope and joy  
And oh Lord,  
Soon  
Please!

Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry for help come to you.  
Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn  
your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. For my days  
vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers. My  
heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my  
food. Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin  
and bones. I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the  
ravens. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof  
(Psalm 102:1-7).

Betty Nelson told me she’s convinced all her mother’s problems  
came from the chemo. Great! Esther told me all about True’s two  
sisters who died of cancer. Great. Actually none of this is news, I’m  
just antsy today so it made me “poor me”. Good, good to have Nan  
and Wade home. They really are delights. If only Wade will come  
back to You.
December 26, 1986

Whew! What a lovely, happy, bounteous Christmas! I was some kind of pooped last night! No treatment this week. Joy! Bliss! Blood count down. A mixed blessing but I was so glad not to have to feel rotten for Christmas. We are so blessed! Wonderful children. Wonderful marriages so far. Such a blessing!

Still today but later—been a lovely, relaxed day here. Just out to read to Ophelia. Finished Lady’s Confession. Went to the store. She’s so sweet and loves the books so. A joy to read to.

Feel good this week. Need to find time for imagery. Pretty well proven helpful. Need to make time for it. I get so antsy though—it’s like I’m saying to my body, “okay, hurry up and relax!”

I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord: ‘O Lord, save me!’ The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me. Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you (Psalm 116:1-7).

January 1, 1987

A new year. Can’t help wondering if I’ll be here next year. Or be desperately ill or what? You know, I guess, and most of the time I can leave that with You. You do know best. I know that. And You’ll Shepherd me through whatever comes. Did have a treatment this week. Got a little weepy before and after but was able to joke it away with Dave and Nan. Seems like Wednesday was sicker than Tuesday. Tuesday maybe a little more tired than Wednesday. Weird. Doesn’t seem to be a real pattern. Nor a real sickness pattern. Just kind of comes over me in a wave of nausea. Plain crackers are yuck. I thought they’d be great. Just about the time I figure out a “nausea abater” and buy a big bunch of it—Cheezits, sunflower seeds, Ritz crackers—it begins to make me sick! Psychosomatic maybe, but so. Right now Kraft’s olive pimento on either bread or crackers is working well. Peppermint lifesavers and Extra peppermint gum have both remained refreshing since the beginning. Also lettuce (plain) and celery. I thought beef would get yucky. Everyone has said so, but so far it still tastes good.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (Psalm 73:26).
January 9, 1987

Things are going well. I feel “up” today. So often I write when I don’t that it seems like I’m down too much. But I think when I’m up, I do things and stay busy and feel no need to unload. The nausea comes and goes as does the fatigue, but it’s all very bearable—very irritating but not devastating. Dr. Larson wants me to go to Jack to see if I’m pregnant since I haven’t had a period for two and a half months. I feel like A) there’s no way I could be unless this is Super Sperm and able to leap tall buildings at a single bound, and B) I probably won’t abort even though the drugs cause defects, so there’s no hurry about a definitive answer. I’m taking bunches of vitamins. I pray I’m not pregnant and don’t believe I am. Wouldn’t that be another rock on top of a huge pile?!? Ah well, You do know best. So much of it is beyond me.

I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety (Psalm 4:8).

January 31, 1987

I’ve had some wonderful weeks lately. Have felt good more often than bad. Can’t ask for better than that. And yet the bottom dropped out of my white count, and I’ve got the “poor me’s” something awful. I came all over tired awhile ago, and I’m piled up here on the bed. It’s a gorgeous day, and I can hear Wade and Dave outside talking, and I resent it that I can’t work up the gusto to go join them. The “poor me’s” indeed! And little Jeff Goad has had a recurrence. I’m sure he feels so betrayed after five years to have it again.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express (Romans 8:26).

Oh Father,
Not again!
Not again!
Please!
I feel betrayed
Stunned
Bowed down with having to do this again
I can’t! I can’t!
Help me!
Help me be still
Help me know no pit is too deep
No night too dark
For You to lift me out of it
and into You.
Corrie ten Boom said that.
I never dreamed I'd have to believe it
So deeply,
So when-I-don't-feel-You.
Help!
Help my deepest self know,
Know
That You will bring me back,
That I don't have to be afraid,
That Your strength,
Your tremendous power
Will bring me back
And even make this awful pit
Useful for You
and for me.
Thank You!

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord (Psalm 40:1-3).

February 18, 1987

Well... Monday was a frazzlement. Got my first treatment in a month and was informed that the DOD [Department of Defense] contract would only apply within a forty-mile radius of St. Joseph's. And I can't go there and use CHAMPUS [military insurance]. At first I was a little panicky. It was like they were saying, "Sorry, you'll just have to drop dead." Then I realized there are alternatives, You are working in my life, etc. Maybe it's time to quit. I'm somewhat confused as I've prayed so to touch Dr. Larson's life with You and it's sort of goodbye. But, thanks to Sarah and Jimmy's contingency money (and You!), I am provided for. I'm just trying to hear Your voice in this. Do You mean stop now? That would eliminate most contact with Dr. Larson, etc. Do You mean continue and take the six-month stats and trust You for the rest? Do You mean go for nine and use the contingency money? Go for twelve? Change to
Mark's Pharmacy and Dr. Monday and use CHAMPUS and touch those lives? Go to Bergstrom? I'm not even sure that's a possibility. I'm feeling less frazzled. I was very weepy. I felt my decisions had been made and now I have to re-pray, re-think, and that makes me weepy. Sorry. I need to trust You more. I'll see Dr. Monday today and see what he thinks.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (1 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Father
Help!
Shepherd
Help!
I know I'm not to be anxious
But—I am
I know You'll give me wisdom
But—where is it?
Help me wait on You
Help me be still
And know Who You are
Calm my troubled heart
Calm my frantic thought
Reach in and still me
Be still
Be still
Thank you!

I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken (Psalm 16:7-8).

February 20, 1987

Much calmer now. Have almost decided to go for the six months and make-ups and trust You for the rest. I don't think that's fool-hardy. I pray You'll help me know or feel reasonably sure that's what You would have me do. At any rate, I'm not panicked about it. Thank You! I did get a three week extension with Dr. Larson—not with the pharmacy. I'll get the stuff from Mark and take it in with me. That way Mark will get the profit. Physically I'm doing wonderfully well. Fatigue a bigger problem than nausea though it's still there. Heartburn really bad. Bloat pretty bad which makes me feel really ugly. Didn't realize quite how vain I really was!
“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

February 24, 1987

Talked to Dr. Larson yesterday—did get a treatment. He laid a little fear on me—or soberness rather than fear. Seems I am a high risk—I thought I was fairly low. Seems more than four lymph nodes put you at greater risk. Also estrogen receptors being negative makes it higher. He really thinks nine months is a compromise and strongly advises against just six. So—now I’m leaning toward nine months with Monday and the emergency room here. That would save me three hours driving each treatment day. Was awake 2 – 2 1/2 hours last night. Some nausea. Thought I might break my record and actually throw up. Did some imagery and some praying, but my mind seemed to be jumpy and couldn’t settle to either. I can’t figure out why I’m so upset. It’s no big deal to switch to here. I’m a little afraid they won’t be as good with the needle as Dr. Larson. Maybe it’s the control thing again. I’m not getting to do what I had decided, and it’s upsetting me.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparable great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:17-20).

April 10, 1987

Here at the farm. Glorious day.
Sometimes I wonder
How I’ll be able to handle heaven,
Honestly
It’s spring
The flowers are so unbelievable
So bountiful
So beautiful
It hurts me!
I can't say it
Just gasp at each new view
How will I hold the wonder of You
and Yours?
Will You stretch my capacity
for joy?
Yes, I think You will
For now I think of it
You already have.
I see so much more now.
I realize You so much more now.
Oh Father
It's mind boggling
Awesome
Thank You!

Bridge Club comes to spend the night. Should be lots of fun.
Disaster last weekend. Big time virus. Thought the honeymoon
was over, but so much better, obviously a virus. No treatment Tues-
day. Count down to 2800. Dr. Monday called to check when he
heard and that made me feel cared for. Three treatments here. No
problems. A little more waiting time between the blood work and
treatment, but so much easier than trip to Houston. Trebby Bruning
does treatment. Like old times as she did Letha's. I'm so glad it all
happened now—oh me of little faith. Would still love to quit. If I
feel so, how must Jeff Goad feel?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you
so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night,
and am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and
were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed
(Psalm 22:1-5).

Again Father?
Oh, Father, again?
It's too much to ask
too much
This kills me!
I've done this already
I've felt this fear—this horror—before
How can I stand it again?
How?
"I can do all things through Christ
   who strengthens me."
My mind knows that, my intellect,
But my emotions are in shreds.
My panic reigns supreme right now.
Okay...
Okay
I know inside myself that You can
   get me through this.
Help me!
Calm Me!
Help me be still and know You
And know you are greater than
   this black hole that looms before me.
Be still...
Be still...
Thank You!

May 8, 1987

At the farm again. Resumed treatments last week. Trebby was concerned at 92,000 drop in platelets, but they had to be done by hand, and I think the count was inaccurate. It's all guesswork anyhow! Tolerating treatments so well. A bit tireder when resumed. I wonder if your body has to re-acclimate after a respite. A possibility I might get to quit end of July if no more delays. I figure bound to be delays so it'll probably be mid-September.

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him for God is our refuge (Psalm 62:5-8).
May 9, 1987

Still at farm. So peaceful here.
I thought I'd sit awhile and count my blessings,
Thought it an easy thing to do.
My husband, children, family, friends,
The countless problems You have seen me through.
The list grows longer Lord, in fact,
You’ve blessed me till I can’t tell it all!
My Friend, my Father, my Dearest Love,
Who answers every time I call!

I need peace within myself about the chemo again. Am so ready
to quit—uneasy feelings about doing it at all—did I misunderstand?
Funny. My hair is back, and I’m so paranoid I figure if it isn’t work-
ing on my hair anymore, it isn’t working on the cancer either! Funny!
And it’s not so funny. I’m ashamed to even complain when I think
of Jeff Goad. Confused. It’s not fair to You to ask for no problems
and then pour massive poisons in. And, if chemo is not the answer,
and there are no problems, they’ll never search for another way. I
need to do imagery again. Can’t seem to quiet my mind and body
for it anymore—just whip through it. Need to be more serious about
taking care of myself. Hate that preoccupation. Honestly too lazy,
I think, to be meticulous about gums, nutrition, exercise, imagery.
So time consuming. Wonder if I could image and quilt at the same
time—then maybe I’d be more willing to do it. So blessed. Doing so
well with it all.

In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to
shame. Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn
your ear to me and save me. Be my rock of refuge, to which
I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are
my rock and my fortress (Psalm 71:1-3).

What a patchwork my life is, Father.
Good times, bad, blah times, sad.
It’s odd to see how many directions I can go.
If I try to piece it into something beautiful
I’ll never make it, Lord.
Thank You that at least that much I know.
But Lord, if I’ll just leave it up to You,
Let You piece together my life’s quilt,
What a beautiful person I could learn to be.
All of us are bits of good and bad,
Bits of blessing, bits of sin.
Piece me into a whole acceptable to Thee.
He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun (Psalm 37:6).

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

May 11, 1987

Just finished Landorf’s Silent September—a beautiful book. Precious Peggy sent. Nothing really new—just a fellow traveler on the Way. Will be a good sharer with Marvin, Ellen, Carol. A lovely weekend at the farm. Good for Dave to relax—me too. Super sermon on worry/trust Sunday night. I hadn’t realized I was stewing so much about hurrying and quitting chemo. Sorry, Lord. Whatever You say, I just hope I know what You’re saying! I’m tired of it—ashamed that I feel like this in light of Jeff’s real agony, but there’s no question I’m tired.

I cry out to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way (Psalm 142:1-3).

June 4, 1987

Working in Dave’s office for two weeks while Shirley is gone. No way I could have been a career woman! Very little left after whole day. Back in Houston for treatments again. Some confusion whether DOD or St. Joseph’s rule but at any rate, qualified again. Kind of hated to switch because so homey up here, but financially silly not to. Sick this week, but not vomiting—just feel sick a lot. And pretty tired. And pretty weepy. Seems silly when I’m tolerating it so well but just want it to go away. Compared to other people’s problems nothing—Jane, Bucky, Jeff. I’m ashamed. Can’t seem to make the weepies disappear but ask You to help realize chemicals—not justified! Help to function and bless lives anyway.
Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; God sends his love and his faithfulness (Psalm 57:1-3).

Could You make
My life
A praise song to You?
I mean for it to be
But so often
I lose sight of that
Thank You for accepting
My want to's
When my actions
Don't always match
Forgive me
When that happens
I want to be Your person
So much
I'm hanging in there
Better than I used to
Thank You for that!
I can hardly wait
To become the real me
The one You can make me
If I'll just let You
Help me let You!

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:21-25).

June 11, 1987

Well, well, well. Saw Dr. Monday yesterday and what I suspected might be a lump really might be. I had really wanted him to say it was my paranoia! He doesn't seem concerned about it—hey! It's not his breast! I'll have mammogram July 2 and he'll call to let me
know I’m all right as he puts it. Hmmmm. I don’t feel panicked. I do feel uneasy. I’d like very much to not go through this again. Second treatment in a row. Good. My count up nicely—8600 last week – 6000 this week. Thank You! Maybe I can get some consecutive treatments and get on with this. I’m ashamed to be so antsy about it, but inside I really am!

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6)

June 15, 1987

Jane’s birthday—25. Goodness, where did the years go? Feel a little sick—I think psychosomatic because of tomorrow’s treatment. Could be legit though since I take Cytoxin every day. If this does turn out to be a second cancer, I’m really wondering what I’ll do. The lump is so central they will probably say radiation. Yuck! I’d like to not do chemo again. Course I’d like for the whole thing to go away!

Poor Marvin is in such pain and misery. Malignant is certainly the word for this. Watching him, I can’t help shuddering a little to think I may face that. Thank You that You’ll help me through it if I have to.

Several hours of insomnia last night. Did some imagery and relaxation—the latter pretty hilarious since I try to hurry it so. Good talks with You. Planning time. Started to get up and Accomplish Something but too tired. Felt good to just lie there even without sleep.

When I am afraid, I will trust in You (Psalm 56:3).

June 17, 1987

Phooey! No treatment yesterday. 3600 bloodcount. That really surprised me since it was 6000 last week. Disappointing since I thought I’d be able to string maybe four together this time. Iva Jean was with me so I didn’t ask about quitting and such. Told him about Dr. Monday/mammogram/lump. He said you can always talk yourself into having found something since everyone is so different. Agreed mammogram would be the answer. I asked about my blood count and this time he did remember. I guess he just mentally says okay or not and doesn’t pay a lot of attention to the numbers. It does give you a moment’s pause as to whether this man knows which body he’s dealing with—especially when he says “Which arm?” I
reckon when you see as many people as he does, it is hard to keep track. Funny—I’m very special to me!

The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing (Zephaniah 3:17).

June 18, 1987

Tended to Aunt Billie yesterday. Just plain didn’t have time to rest. Felt Ophelia needed the reading more than I did the 45 minutes it took. Then today it’s to Brenham and probably won’t get back till four or so—might be able to rest then. It’s not that I work so hard or do so much—just piddling things interfere. I really am going to try to schedule it better. So many people needing things, though. No way to help them all.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:16-21).

June 24, 1987

Well, an end in sight! I told Dr. Larson I was mentally sucking my thumb a lot and needed a target. So he said if I have no more delays, I can end in September. Yea! A little over two more months! If I could just find something to eat or drink to build up white cells! Dave and I have decided I need to make myself slow down and rest more. I really am going to try. But there’s so much to be done. So many people to help – visits, etc. I did get a treatment yesterday. Met a darling man with lymphoma. Bless his heart. He was just worn out. Going to see Marvin. I think I’ll take the pain technique thing over to him today. He may feel too silly doing it, but it may help. Can’t help thinking will this be me in a couple of years? Shudder! I’m also going to try to get back to imagery. I think it helped me accept the chemo and maybe it’ll help the ol’ body build up white blood. Sure is cheap to do!
No matter how grim it gets
How awful
How painful
You will walk through it with me
I know that
I hang on to that like grim death
The poem says You carry me
I’m not sure of that
But help me bear it You do
And You will
I shudder at what may come
Tremble a little—
Tremble a lot
But deep inside is the bulwark
You
I can bear it
Whatever it may turn out to be
Because of You
Thank You

Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who
will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will
sustain you and I will rescue you (Isaiah 46:4).

June 25, 1987

Today is a day that I’m tired of this! Partly because I’m physi-
cally tired I imagine. Am trying to rest more to keep the ol’ white
count up but my mind can’t seem to rest. Am doing more imagery.
Couldn’t still my mind yesterday so did imagery then. Did twice
during the night while awake and stewing. I am ashamed of my
impatience because You’ve blessed me so with the toleration of it.
Could be Marvin upsets me because I can’t help wondering if I’ll
be like that in a year or so. I don’t think so—the upset I mean. I’ve
pretty well accepted that You’ll strengthen me for whatever I need.
I’d like You to quiet my mind again if You will—Be still...be still...
and know that I am God. Amen!

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by
prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests
to God. And the peace of God which transcends all under-
standing, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ
Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).
Occurs to me that I’ve never written out my imagery. So:

I see my cancer cells as little grey rats scurrying around “seeking whom they may devour.” But they’re so evil and selfish that they can’t cooperate. “I’m going for the pancreas.” “Not me, buddy, I’m going for the liver.” “Unh-unh, me for the brain.” Then the chemo is this heavy yellow fluid that works like a bug light. Zzzt! Zzzt! Zzzt! Every time it hits a cancer cell it either stuns or kills it. And my good cells say, “Great! Here! Here’s one behind me driving me nuts,” and they move out of the way so the chemo can touch all the cancer cells. Then come my gorgeous white blood cells. They are angels—wonderful, fine, young men—some dressed in white tunics al la Roman time, some in white tennis outfits—all strong and brave, with good faces, though a little stern and serious because they have a job to do. A little sad because they are my cells that have run amuck, and they wish with all their hearts the cells would turn back and do right. But they cannot be allowed to harm my body any longer. They all have airtight lead boxes, and they come up out of my bone marrow and go all over my body—brain, blood, lungs, heart, liver, kidneys, intestines, everywhere. They pick up each cancer cell and seal it in the boxes. They get all of them and throw them out my rectum for God to deal with however He wants to—but they’re OUT of me. Then they go back and tell the chemo they couldn’t have done it without it, but it can’t stay and harm my body either. So they flush it out all the way with much gratitude but soberly determined that it has to go too. Then they slap hands and say “Aright!” They meet with God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit and me and we all sit around just running over with gladness, and God and Jesus keep saying, “Well done! Well done, y’all!” and we celebrate my being fine! Makes me feel good to think it and to write it.

I can scarcely believe it, Lord,
That You can help me see
Chemotherapy
Of all things
As a friend,
An Ally.
It’s an inside miracle.
I was so afraid
So bone deep terrified.
And You are changing that.
You are helping me see
That You can use anything –
Anything at all
To help those You love

40
And that I am one of those!
Oh Father,
What can I say?
Thank You!

But we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5:3-5).

July 1, 1987

Phooey! So much for “no more delays”! No treatment yester-
day. 3900 so I’ll probably get one next week. Frustrating! And frustrating trying to rest. Too many people need help.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).

July 7, 1987

Today is a treatment day—I fondly hope. Dr. Larson says rest makes no difference at all. Just laying off the chemicals will do it. Aren’t our bodies amazing? You did a grand job! If I’ll just leave it be, it bounces back so fast—blood especially it seems like.

I really am “great and wonderfully made.”
Thank You, Father.
For this body
With its amazing precision
Its unmatched computer
Its countless back up systems.
I don’t speak DNA or electrical impulses
But even I know
You did an amazing job!
Thank You!

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am
fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:9-16).

Came home from Granbury to find Marvin died Saturday. Sad for the family, but I’m so glad he didn’t keep on. Funeral service today. Started to try to knock myself out to get back for it but decided service not all that important — and Houston traffic a killer to try to hurry through.

Awfully tired this week. A lot of late nights visiting I guess, and could be low count too.

July 17, 1987

No treatment for two weeks. Hope to get one today. He (Dr. Larson) said I could quit in September if no more delays—but I’ve had two since then so I’m sure it’ll be October at the earliest. I really should not look forward to dates. In this instance it just sets me up for a disappointment. Wonder if You’re teaching me patience through this?

Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him” (Lamentations 3:22-24).

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord (Psalm 27:14).

Pat Cole: two mastectomies and now brain cancer. So gallant! Ola Allen: cancer of the everything and dying. So gallant! Jeff Goad: brain cancer/radiation/chemo at eight years. Now at thirteen brain cancer and chemo. Fell and broke his leg. Would like his cast off by 1 p.m. so when he has his treatment later in the day, he’ll be able to run back and forth to the bathroom to be sick. Gallant!

I’m sure there are people who are not gallant, but my privilege has been to meet the gallant ones. I hope I can stay gallant no matter what. So far it’s been easy because I’m so blessed to tolerate it so well.
I kind of dread treatments which is stupid because they’re a piece of cake, but I really get sick just sitting there waiting. So many people in such serious stages in the waiting room is sobering. I pray to touch their lives for You.

Haven’t rested much at all these two weeks. Larson said it makes no difference. I’ll probably have to set aside some time with chemicals in me!

I’m just overwhelmed, Lord
With death—
    so many    so young
    so all around me
With suffering
    so many    so young
So ever present
I’m tired
I’m scared
I’m down
I know death is only an incident
In the whole adventure
Someone said that – I forget who
I know that, but...
I’m tired
    and scared
    and down
    anyway
Forgive me
Help me trust you
Without answers...
Just trust You

For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men (Lamentations 3:31-33).

August 11, 1987

Still on sort of an inside downer. Can’t seem to shake it. Pat Cole so sobering—two mastectomies, two brain tumors—petit mal seizures. So young. So brave. So many people. How do doctors and nurses keep their equilibrium? I think I’m having a bit of depression—not sure if it’s “natural” due to so many sicks and death. It could be the chemicals but doubt there’s anything to counteract that.
And too, I think the devil would love for me to see only the bad—the sickness, death, man’s inhumanity, the famine, etc. Need to look up—see the sweetness, the prayers being said all over the world, the volunteers, the acts of heroism, the Mother Teresas, the people I know who are sweet, caring, doers of the Word, the camaraderie and love among so many people. Hey! I’m feeling pretty good!

Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Philippians 4:8).

I saw You today, Lord,
Right beside the litter
In a crack in a dirty sidewalk.
Six tiny daisies
Saying
"Hey! I’m still here!
I’ll never forsake you."
Help me look for the daisies,
The gentle reminders.
Don’t let me dwell on the litter
Or the cracks in the sidewalk.

August 20, 1987

Well, Thank You. Dr. Larson cut the dosage in the hope my white count would tolerate it better and it has! I’ve had four treatments in a row which I haven’t been able to do but once way back last September. So—that’s really hopeful. Maybe I can quit in October—maybe even September. I’m trying not to get too up about it.

Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me (Psalm 54:4).

August 24, 1987

I’m more up than I’ve been in awhile. Getting excited about teaching projects. Thank You! Help me help Pat with that. Not dwell on deaths and dying. Feel pretty good enough of the time that I’m impatient when I’m feeling bad. The cut dosage seemed to make me sicker for awhile. Weird. I’m working up the courage to put Dr. Larson on the spot tomorrow about when I might quit. Stomach tightens just thinking about tomorrow. Psyche funny. I get

Help me to learn
Whatever it is I needed
From this.
How awful
For someone to have to suffer so
To learn obedience.
I don’t see much earthly good.
Well, that’s not true.
A lot of good has come—
Chiefest—the lavish love
Your children have shown.
But still, the suffering
Seems a ghastly price.
Forgive my doubts.
Strengthen my faith.
And thank You
That my weakness
Doesn’t anger You.

I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea: ‘Do not close your ears to my cry for relief.’ You came near when I called you, and you said, “Do not fear” (Lamentations 3:55-57).

August 25, 1987

I’m frazzled and depressed—or something. Five treatments in a row though—that’s great! Dr. Larson in a bad mood. Was not amenable to talk of quitting though he’d have let me today if I’d insisted. I’ll have scans done in September and talk about it again. In his opinion I’ve done the bare minimum. He does recognize there comes to be a mental problem about it. Suggests I go on as long as I can stand to. I’m ashamed to be so fraught about it, but there’s no doubt I am. Probably need to go back to imagery. I guess one reason (aside from my basic disbelief in chemotherapy) is I subconsciously counted on being through by now, and I’m mentally pouting. Why should I have the “poor me’s” when I look at Jeff and
Pat—but they’re really part of it. I have the “poor us’s”! Guess I’ll wait for the scans, see how I do with the lower dosage, count on all of September, and make any big decisions after that. Or maybe I’ll be a teakettle as Mimi used to say.

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know (Jeremiah 33:3).

Is there someone I must touch, Lord?
Must I fight the mainline theories of killing?
What is it You would have me do?
Open my mind to You, Your will.
Don’t let me go off half-cocked on my own.
Let me be a channel.
Oh, if I could be an instrument
For overcoming evil with good!
Wouldn’t that feel wonderful?
I’ll need courage.
I know You’ll be there with all I need.
I’ll need wisdom.
You’ve already promised.
I’ll need strength.
You’ve already said for each day.
Keep me near You, Lord.
Accomplish what You want with me.
Don’t let me get in the way.

September 11, 1987

Well…let’s see. I sucked my thumb and whined three weeks ago and Dr. Larson got a little short with me—partly due to the fact that he was in a horrible mood because he had just talked to a good friend of his who is dying of cancer. Anyhow, he said the decision was mine, I’ve had the bare minimum, he felt anything beyond was a real plus, etc. I took that treatment. Spent the next week wrestling with it and talking to God. Decision: I felt that originally God led me to this man so I’d better do as he suggests. So I’ll try thirty-nine treatments. Problem is the sporadic ones don’t count—they have to be three in a row. So it’ll be at least the end of the year before I’m through. My “suffering” is mainly mental—just a kind of PMS feeling about it all. Ashamed considering Pat Cole and Jeanine Dooley. I do get sicker on Monday and Tuesday just knowing it’s coming. And knowing it’s psychosomatic doesn’t seem to make it go away. Need to practice the imagery I’m preaching to Pat! I have decided—told Dr. Larson when my count I down, I just won’t bother
to come in for a couple of weeks. Save myself some hassle since it usually takes a couple to come back. I'm sorely tempted to wait three though Dr. Larson feels that would be pushing it. He plans to do complete blood work next time and then schedule bone and liver scans to check on things. I'm "down in the back" right now—not one bit different from my yearly attack, but I'm so paranoid, I think, "Is this it? Bone cancer?" Silly!

Jesus was afraid.  
He said His heart was "sore troubled."  
Mine is too.  
Sometimes pain  
    and depression  
    and death  
Loom before me  
    like a black hole.  
What am I afraid of?  
That I'll fail You?  
That I'll whine?  
That it will be more than I can bear?  
And what will I do if it is?  
All of the above?  
And so I turn to You  
My strength  
    and my Love.  
You are in me  
    to will  
    and to do Your will.  
I know I want to—  
That You've done.  
And I count on You  
As my Enabler  
To bear my cross  
And glorify Your name.

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10).

October 22, 1987

Whew! Too busy to write. Liver and bone scans came out negative. Even though I don't think they're reliable, it's nice to have them negative! Feeling okay about treatments. Would still love to quit. The way I figure, I have seven more treatments which will take me
till the end of the year. I’m pretty sure. But seven more looks like light at the end of the tunnel. My joint pain is pretty bad—in my feet of all places. I assume it’s from the chemicals. Could be arthritis I guess, but it’s so matching. I feel like it’s the chemicals. Many projects going on—quilts, afghans, four collars for secretaries, sampler for Jane, dresses for three girls, plus country stuff for Christian Women’s Club. If cancer patients are supposed to have goals, I think I overkilled.

You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light (Psalm 18:28).

November 11, 1987

Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I am free at last!

Dismissed yesterday from chemotherapy. Finally nine months worth. Elation is a good word for it. Still x-rays, blood follow-ups, a little lump to “watch” so I guess a certain amount of paranoia will always be with me, but at last I can look forward to feeling good again! Thank You, God!

Oh Father!
Oh Father!
It’s over!
Euphoric
Ecstatic
Extremely grateful,
That’s me!
It feels so good to feel good!
Oh, I thank You!
I pray it’s over for good,
But, if not,
This beautiful respite,
This time of non-dread,
Is wonderful!
I thank You!

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases (Psalm 103:1-3).
Another Blow

I just thought cancer and chemo were my least favorite time in my life! My Dave died January 25, 2001, after a blessedly short battle with cancer.

We had a perfect trip to the Czech Republic to meet our correspondence students (we teach them English using the Bible as a textbook) during May, June, and July 2000. We were together 24 hours a day except for a very few hours on 2 occasions. We met 70 of our students and their families and friends in 64 towns in 82 days. Sort of like a political campaign with no lies!

Dave had a slight cough while there which we attributed to Spring and all the flowers. He was breathless, but so was I. We just thought we were getting old! He was tired when we returned home, but we thought it was the marathon trip. Finally the Lord gave him chest pain and we went to the doctor, thinking it might be his heart. They found a spot on his lung. By the time we saw a lung specialist, he had developed a lot of fluid in his chest cavity which turned out to be malignant. A biopsy, broncoscopy showed metastasized lung cancer. Three weeks after that, an MRI showed “innumerable” brain tumors. From diagnosis to his death was only 3 months. Hindsight and logic tell me this was a great blessing, but I still find myself reeling from the shock of it all. I thank God for Himself as I see no way I could have gotten through it without Him. Dave died at home. All the children were there the last night. (Isn't God amazing with the way He sends “urges” to us?) We all climbed in bed with him or sat as near as we could on the side of the bed. Hugged him, touched him, held his hand. He was strong enough and lucid enough for us to tell him we loved him and for him to tell us he loved us too. It was wonderful and terrible. The children all went to bed around midnight. (None of us really realized he was dying that night.) Then it was just Dave and me till he died at 2:45 a.m. That was wonderful and terrible too. What a special man he was! He loved his God, his family, his church, and his country. Our oldest son says, “The word ‘integrity’ in the dictionary has Dad’s picture beside it.” Our youngest son says, “He could be stern at times, but when he smiled or laughed, it lit up his face like nothing else in the world.” Our youngest daughter says, “Unswerving is probably a very good one word description of Dad’s character. He believed in God, with no doubts, all the way to their meeting.” Our oldest daughter says,” He helped anyone who asked (and many who didn’t) even if he didn’t understand them or agree with them. He met his cancer with anger at Satan, but confidence in God’s goodness, grace, and plan.”
Here is a statement he asked to have read at his "celebration" service:

I've asked a statement to be read at my memorial service. Too many times memorial services become unbelievable eulogies. I would like a lot of happy times to be remembered. I would like a lot of dumb Hines jokes to be told. Please don't make too many more bad ones than good ones! I made a lot of mistakes, but even some of those turned out to be a lot of fun. I believe the important thing will be to just remember a lot of events. I don't want to make a lot of specific requests, but I would like congregational singing of "God is So Good" because it is true. And also the singing of "It is Well with My Soul" (with gusto) because it is. Please make this a celebration because I've had my miracle—I'm home!

I know that God will fill the black hole inside of me with Himself in time. Just now I'm finding that this phase of my life is even worse than the last phase, but I know He will make good things come of it if I will let Him—and with a lot of help from Him, I plan to let Him

David—Thank You, God, for him!
Thank You for that piercing honesty,
Sometimes uncomfortable, always a bulwark!
Thank You for his love for You!
Thank You for his absolute faith in You.
He didn't always do Your will, but he always wanted to!
Thank You for his amazing gift of fixing things—
anything with wheels or movable parts and sometimes hearts.
Thank You for his knowledge of Your book
his practical way of teaching it. Thank You for his courage
his "Captain Avenger" style of taking up for picked-on folks.
Thank You for his love for the kids.
Sometimes tough, sometimes so tender, always there!
Thank You for his love for me!
My favorite place in all this world is inside one of his hugs!
The only way I can stand this is to know
that he is inside one of Yours!
Thank You!

Judy
When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).
Kleenex Party without Dave

Sleepless nights without Dave

Eating all by myself without Dave
The Rest of the Story
(Our God is
An Awesome God!)

God is SO amazing sometimes! For one thing, He has made my cancer and chemotherapy and my recurrences some of my greatest blessings. Through Him, I have been able to empathize and encourage people in the same situations as I never could have done without going through it. There is no way I could know exactly what cartoon or card or scripture a person needs on Thursday when I am mailing it on Monday. And yet many people have told me what came on a particular day was exactly what they needed. Who could do that but God?

Praise be 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 Corinthians 1:3,4).

And then we come to my darling Johnny. I was not looking to marry again—absolutely not interested. I was not asking God to send anyone for me to love. I was very busy with church, family, volunteer work, and such. But God had a fabulous plan. He had been putting together for several years—possibly fifty!

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

Background: Johnny Ragsdale and I had dated in high school—even "gone steady" for a while. We went our separate ways. I married David and had my four children—Mark, Jane, Nancy, and Wade. He married Mary and had his two girls—Georgia and Laura. I think we had seen each other twice in 35 years and not any for the last 20 or so. Now bear in mind, I lived in Burton, Texas, population 359. About 11 years ago John and Mary were shopping for a ranch and ended up about three miles out of Burton, Texas. Go figure! I saw John and his daughter at a cafeteria about 12 miles from us, and thus God brought us back into friendship. Really Mary and I were better friends than John and I. When they came to the farm Mary and I almost always
lunched together, and we really loved each other. Mary had polycystic kidney disease and was desperately ill. Johnny had been a faithful care-giver for years. She died about two years after Dave did. John came by the house about a month after her death just to unload about it all. Then he came by another time to show me (at my request) all their old photos and to catch me up on their lives. The rest of the story is that over the next months we re-fell in love.

Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear (Isaiah 65:24).

You can imagine how shy I felt with my battered body. Not only do I have a mega scar where a breast used to be, but I have Lichen Sclerosus et atrophicus (LSA) which became vulva cancer and I have had drastic surgery on my South end. I am so fused together that normal sex is not an option. The first time Johnny kissed me, I felt I needed to tell him all this so he could bail out before we got too much in love. This conversation took place with my head in his chest, talking to his armpit as he patted my back and assured me that none of it mattered to him. What a DEAR man! Normally I would not share such details, but I know how scary it is to think of letting someone you love so much see and deal with the realities of that kind of surgery.

...The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7b).

And it seems the guys who love us do, too. We married March 15, 2004. John has had by-pass surgery and a really scary battle with pneumonia and had a complex cyst on one kidney that we follow with MRIs. We still have some paranoia about cancer for me, but oh, we are blessed! We pray for YEARS more together.

Of course I prayed NOT to have cancer each of the three times I had it. I prayed NOT to have to take chemotherapy. I prayed for Dave to live. John prayed for Mary to live. I am gradually learning that God's "No's" are just as gracious and loving as His "Yes's." I like "Yes!" better, but oh, the good He can bring from the "No's." Kathy Triccoli sings a song, one verse of which stays with me: "How would I know You could deliver? How would I know You could set free? If there'd never been a battle, how could there be a victory?"

Once Johnny told me, "When I was 17 years old, I prayed every night that God would make you love me as much as I loved you. I
didn't realize it would take Him fifty years to answer that prayer!” I pray that you will know and feel the love God has for you. I pray that you will be open to whatever plan—WHATEVER plan—He has for you. God bless you and keep you close to Him through every phase of your life!

Come and see what God has down, how awesome his works in man’s behalf! (Psalm 66:5).