



And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:7

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the Cavins in Colorado! We pray this time of year finds you doing well and enjoying time with family and friends as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

I started writing this at Thanksgiving while at Drew and Jen's house outside Hayesville, NC. Brett, Julie and Lauren plus Jen's mom and her husband were there also. So it was a great time to be together and sort of end the "Christmas letter" year. So first, let's rewind to this time last year. Most of the year was consumed with Susan's medical journey. Many of you have been updated throughout the year, But I'll provide an overview for any who missed it.

The symptoms. In December last year Susan began to show some signs of disorientation and some physical weakness. The left corner of her mouth began drooping. At Christmas all the kids noticed it and insisted that she see her doctor, which we had already planned to do when we got home. And Christmas last year was quite an ordeal anyway – we stayed in a B&B near Blanchard with Drew and Julie's families. Oklahoma had the worst snowstorm in history over the Christmas weekend and it made all the activities a little stressful with a lot of driving on snowy/icy roads. But we had Christmas in Chickasha and celebrated dad's 90th and mom's 88th birthday in OKC with the larger Cavin clan. We did see a doctor the last week of December and he agreed that it was likely something like Bell's Palsy, but wanted to get a CAT scan "to eliminate any other possibilities."



The tumor. In January she had the CAT scan and it showed a large tumor on the right side of her brain in the lining – a meningioma. In addition there was a small meningioma in the rear center of the brain. Since a meningioma is in the lining of the brain it is not involved in the brain itself and so is typically completely resolved by surgery. And most (97%) of meningiomas are benign and very slow growing. So our outlook was surgery and short recovery. Unfortunately this tumor had a major blood vessel involved. The local neurosurgeon referred us to University of Colorado Hospital in Denver where they could better deal with any issues from the blood vessel. We were blessed to have the dean of the neurosurgery department as our doctor and the hospital was a great facility with excellent staff.

The surgery. Susan had "brain surgery" on Feb 10 to remove the tumor and the doctor said it all went well. But he had to leave a little of the tumor that was around the blood vessel since he did not want to risk damaging the blood vessel. However, a couple of days later when the pathology came back it indicated the tumor was of the rare malignant variety. The doctor suggested that with that diagnosis, the best course of action was to get the rest of the tumor out – the risk of complications with the blood vessel were much smaller than the risk of the tumor growing back. So on Feb 15 Susan had a second brain surgery. The doctor said he was able to get the entire tumor out with no complications. We were thankful to the Lord that it all went well and she came through the surgeries very well. She was up walking and having visitor the day after both surgeries.



The recovery. Despite getting the entire tumor out, the doctor recommended that she go through a vigorous series of radiation treatments and oral chemo, just to be sure any leftover micro cells were taken care of. So in April she started 6 weeks of oral chemo, 5 weeks of "standard" radiation" followed by 8 days of "enhanced" radiation, and then a week of a special technique called Cyberknife. It is a very focused radiation beam that they pointed at the smaller tumor in the back. Susan came through all of this fairly well. She only had a couple of nights of nausea with the chemo and an anti-nausea medicine fixed that. She seemed to be well on the way to a quick recovery.



Then about the first of July she started showing signs of weakness, confusion, and some memory loss. She started on physical therapy thinking that the radiation/chemo had just weakened her. We've spent 5 months on this regimen and there is no significant improvement. She has to use a cane or walker wherever she goes. We have a wheelchair we'll use if we need to get out somewhere. She saw a neurologist the first of December and he has recommended occupational therapy and wants her to continue her physical therapy. Unfortunately on Saturday the 11th she lost her balance and fell. After a trip to the emergency room – broken tooth, cut lip, and a compression fracture of one vertebrae – the doc admitted her to the hospital for observation, then after a few nights referred her to a skilled nursing facility (i.e. rehab), where she is today. They will work with her on physical, occupational, and cognitive therapy. Hopefully the concentrated work will make a difference. Needless to say our plans for Christmas in Oklahoma won't happen. Her lip is healing well, and we will see a dentist to get the tooth fixed. Her back still hurts but the doc said healing takes place when you are active. So hopefully she is in the right place. Keep her in your prayers for a fast recovery.

The kids. So while we were going through our journey with the tumor, both kids were busy changing jobs and homes. After the spring semester Drew left Middle Tennessee State in Murfreesboro to take an assistant professorship in Outdoor Leadership at Young Harris College in north Georgia. He really likes this position better and the college is growing and doing well. They are renting a house on a lake outside of Hayesville, NC and are enjoying the "rural" lifestyle.



Julie was able to change from a contractor to an employee at Alcon Labs but had to move to Oklahoma City in October to service her region of Oklahoma and Arkansas. They are renting a house in Edmond and adjusting to being Okies.

Both families were able to come to Colorado to visit in March after Susan's surgery. And Julie and Lauren made a surprise visit in July. As noted above, we were able to arrange to spend the week of Thanksgiving at Drew and Jen's along with Brett,



Julie and Lauren. Lucy and Lauren turned 1 in August and September and are both walking. Sam will be 4 in January.

Susan's cousin Roger from Houston came for a visit in May and we took him to Rocky Mountain National Park. It was a fun trip and beautiful scenery and



weather. In June Bob and Jeannie visited for a few days and we enjoyed having them stay with us. In November our friends Arden and Mary Lou came to visit from Texas. We really enjoyed their visit and it was good for the girls to get together.



All through the year we have been incredibly blessed with friends from our class and our neighbors who have really pitched in to help Susan – first with transportation to radiation and then taking her to physical therapy. All of you have been a tremendous

blessing!

As for me, I have been at Progressive Insurance for 2 ½ years now and still enjoy being a Business Analyst in the Claims IT department. During the spring we decided that Susan was not likely to ever do any more substitute teaching so she officially retired and started drawing Social Security. We had our share of car problems this year. Again. You'll remember we hit a deer in November last year and had to buy another car. Our new to us 2005 Subaru Outback had a problem that we did not know about when we bought it, so when we drove to Oklahoma for nephew Dylan's wedding, the transmission died as we were getting ready to come home. We had to tow it back to Colorado to be fixed. Thankfully we had purchased an extended warranty that covered the repair (about \$4000!). Combine that with another snowy/icy weekend, and it was a pretty trying time. But we did enjoy Dylan and Lindsay's wedding!

And yet in the midst of all this, Susan and I were still able to do a little **camping**. We camped a couple of times early and

met with bad weather – snow in May and cold rain in June! But July in Gunnison was a nice trip. We were there during the wildflower festival and the flowers were beautiful. Susan's health was at its worst at the end of the summer so we had to cancel our long-awaited trip to Yellowstone. We are looking forward to a full camping



schedule next summer.



By the end of September she was feeling better and we were able to go to Golden Gate Canyon for a weekend (it was chilly) and finish the season at Loveland with our Trailmanor Owners camping group. (That's NOT our camping group to the right, but a herd of big horn sheep we saw in the Big Thompson Canyon



Here are some additional pictures from the year. Hope you enjoy them.

The two pictures below are from Drew's place at Thanksgiving – one looking out east from his deck to the foothills of the Appalachians and the other from his boat dock towards the western sunset. It was quite a nice setting for Thanksgiving this year.



A happy Lauren and Lucy in March.



Sam – with his hair still long in March and cut short in November.



We pray you all have a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Love you all.

Alan and Susan