

## **Tuesday / 3 February 2009**

Joaquin came to visit last night, and he and I had a good long talk about boxing and movies and the usual stuff. He also told some of his funny stories about his life at the Wild Goose Casino and dealing with the public. He took my mind off of the hard day. He'll be here when Michele and I return from our trip to Tacoma for my radiation treatment, and he and I plan to watch one of our old favorite John Wayne movies together, *Big Jake*. I am really looking forward to that. That will be my reward for getting through yet another radiation treatment. I assume I will get through it. I got through the others, and they seem to be getting easier. Let's hope that continues.

### **Later**

The radiation appointment went well, no problems getting on and off the metal table, except for the expected rib pain. Then Michele and I had a talk with the radiation doctor who said that my progress is good, and he informed me that healing would continue for weeks after the radiation therapy was finished. Also he mentioned that my numbers would go down as a result of the radiation killing the cancer on my spine. I hadn't thought about that. Then Michele and I headed home, and she made me a bowl of Thai noodle soup. My nausea was pretty mild so I was eager for a bowl of noodle soup.

## **Wednesday / 4 February 2009**

Today we drive to Tacoma so I can have yet another radiation treatment. My spine feels good today, and even my ribs have given me no pain so far. I expect that today's appointment will be smooth and easy. No appointment for a chat with a doctor today either, so we should be in and out of the Radiation Center in record time. I slept pretty well last night, except for coughing from time to time, and I think that the thalidomide which I began taking again last night after a one week's break, was an aid in that sleep. My feet were restless which caused some problems, but eventually that passed. I am eager to not have to sleep in the Zero Gravity chair any more. I hope that happens one of these days.

## **Later**

The drive to Tacoma and back went great. Sunny weather, blue sky, perfect view of Mt. Rainier. The radiation machine was down when we got to the Tacoma Radiation Center, so we waited a bit and then drove back home to Maple Valley. Now Michele is making me a tuna sandwich. I got a Louis Armstrong box set in the mail, a nice get well card from Gordon my ex-mail carrier and the new *Living Blues Magazine*, so I am set for a pleasant time this afternoon. Life is sweet. Later Michele will bring me home some Thai soup for my dinner.

## **Thursday / 5 February 2009**

Last night I avoided my usual breathing problems in the night. I'd like to think that the Thai hot-and-sour soup that Michele brought me home for my dinner helped with that. The big bowl of soup really cleared out my nose and my head, so breathing was much easier. I am still clear this morning. Michele is gone to QFC to buy groceries for dinner. When she gets back I'll coach her in how to prepare acorn squash stuffed with hamburger and onions and so on. While she's gone I will see how much progress I have made in being able to get myself cleaned up. I've emailed today with Jim about next Tuesday's trip to Tacoma and he has committed to drive me down there which frees up Michele for that day so she can work. I look forward to that. The situation really ties Michele down to her responsibilities as a caregiver, so Jim's willingness to help out is a Godsend.

While Michele was gone, I showered and dressed myself with no problem whatsoever. It's been a couple of months since I have been able to do that without Michele's supervision and her help. The ability to do that simple act brings home to me how low I'd really sunk and how the radiation therapy and perhaps the chemo have helped me improve and bounce back towards what I was before the major back problems and the stay in the hospital. I feel full of energy and hope today. This disease has taught me to take each day at a time, and to appreciate the good days and to not think that the bad days are necessarily going to last long, let alone forever. Now if the rib pain would vanish, I'd be appreciative of that, too. One of these days, I'll wake up and that pain will be gone.

### **Later**

Our trip to Tacoma went great today, but no view of Mt. Rainier. We were in and out of the Tacoma Radiation Center in record time, as the machine was up and the staff was ready for me as we entered the place. I could see at a glance that things were very different from yesterday when the little waiting room near the machine was full of patients in gowns awaiting treatment, the door to the radiation room was closed and technicians were bustling around. None of that today. When the two young women in the treatment room were preparing to put me on the metal treatment table, I made a remark about my not being recalcitrant to be placed on the “bed of pain.” They don’t like to hear me call the table that, but they loved the word and wanted to know what it meant. I explained that it meant that such a person was obstinate and uncooperative towards authority. They commented that they dealt with folks like that sometimes. They said they’d remember that word and use it. Sure they will. Now we are back home and Michele is getting the leftover Thai soup ready for my lunch. My nose and throat can use another treatment of that tasty stuff.

### **Later yet**

I was able to help some with the preparation of tonight’s dinner. I counseled Michele while she fried up hamburger, chopped an onion, and added the other ingredients to the mix that was destined later to be stuffed into the halves of an acorn squash. By me. For the first time in weeks, I was going to shoulder some actual supper preparation. Michele left for a couple of hours of work, and while she was gone, I prepared the acorn squash that had languished on the kitchen windowsill for several months by halving it, cleaning out the seeds and membranes and cooking it to ready it for stuffing.

When Allie got home at 4:30 I had both of the halves of the acorn squash stuffed and ready in the glass baking dish, and Allie placed it in the oven at 400 degrees for the hour that was left before Michele returned home to eat dinner with us. I was at least able to make a small contribution to the household after many weeks of just being sick, as though being sick is a full time job, which I’ve learned it can be. If I am able to do this

small cooking task, that tells me that I am not as sick as I was. That's good news for me. I won't overdo it, but I will try to continue to do at least one small thing like this per day, just so I can reassure myself that I am bouncing back from the depths that I had sunk to.

### **Friday / 6 February 2009**

It's a rainy Friday here, but that shouldn't make much difference to us when we make our trip to Tacoma later for my radiation treatment. After today, if the machine is up and running, I'll have only three more radiation treatments scheduled. It'll be good to not have that trip to Tacoma to work around every day. The results so far have been encouraging. The first couple of treatments were a painful ordeal, but I promised myself I would stick with them for the long run, just to see if good results happened for me. I guess that's my attitude about lots of things I am going through right now, including what is turning into a long wait for the VA to adjudicate my claim for disability due to my exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. What looked like a slam dunk back in October when I first read the VA literature about claims and Agent Orange and MM and the presumptive nature of my situation has turned into far from that. I guess that the VA really does have a policy of waiting for the Army to die. I'd always thought that was just a nasty thing to say about the VA by bitter old vets who were angry. I am not angry, but I am disappointed that the VA cares so little about me. When I get the rare piece of mail from them, at least they now have my name spelled right and my address right. That's mildly encouraging.

### **Later**

Today's trip to Tacoma and back was like that old railroad joke, On again, off again, Finnegan. This was the quickest of all the radiation treatment sessions so far. I thought it funny and appropriate that the song "In the Year 2525" was playing during my treatment. "Hardly a man was left alive." Right. I always hated that song. B. B. King is more my speed. The young women asked me for that word I'd used yesterday. I wracked my brain, but I couldn't think of it. I pleaded short-term memory loss. As I left I was informed that I had only three more sessions left. I knew that already. The only pain

I felt during this session was in my left ribs when getting on and off the hard metal table. No back pain. Progress has been made. Michele and I headed back home and soon I was eating a big bowl of noodle soup, with the weekend ahead of me and no more radiation treatments until Monday. Perhaps I would feel good enough this weekend that Michele and I could go out for lunch in an amusing little bistro, something we haven't done for a very long time. It could happen.

### **Later yet**

Suddenly that word came to me. *Recalcitrant*. Okay, I'll write it down and give it to them on Monday. From the Latin, meaning to kick out with the heels, presumably at an authority figure. It's a good word.

### **Saturday / 7 February 2009**

I got up this morning and took a hot shower and dressed myself in clean clothes, the usual Levi's, black tee, navy blue Carhart overshirt and sheepskin slippers. Amazing what such a special feeling doing a thing that was once so prosaic and taken for granted can give a sick old guy. It almost makes me feel not so sick. I felt imbued with a sense of well being, false or otherwise. Who cares? My father would object and say that I was allowing myself to live in a Fool's Paradise. But my father is long since dead of brain cancer, so I can make different choices. I can still hear his voice, though. Chiding, chiding, always chiding.

Because my dear old friend Jim L. is coming over this next Tuesday to take me to Tacoma for my radiation treatment, and because I am going to ask him for some computer help as he's possessed of highly developed computer skills, I dragged out the vacuum cleaner today and set it up so that I could vacuum out the inch thick grey dust that had collected in the computer grill. Jim has told me more than once how important it is to keep that grill free of accumulated dust. But I have failed to do so. After I vacuumed the dust out, I decided that because I had the vacuum cleaner out, I may as well vacuum the rugs which I proceeded to do. I did fine. No pain, no stress. Once I was done with that, I took stock of the living room and found several pine needles that I missed. I couldn't reach them as they were on the floor, so I put the grabber that my

Cousin Sharon gave me a couple of weeks ago into operation and found that it was so sensitive that it could easily be used to pick the needles up. Later I used it to pick up a pen that I'd dropped behind a piece of furniture. What a handy device! Thank you, Sharon.

Allie (my 16 year daughter) is gone all day today to a dance competition, so Michele and I decide that today is a perfect day for us to play hooky from our house in Maple Valley, a place that is wonderful, but also a place that we've both been spending entirely too much time at, and go somewhere else, somewhere we can find an amusing little bistro and eat a romantic lunch. It's a blue-skied, sunny day, so we head for Issaquah which has one of our favorite restaurants, *Bamiyan*, a Persian place where we've been many times and about which we have many happy memories.

Our time there today was perfect. I left my walker in the car, as Michele was able to park right at the curb, just a few feet from the front door of *Bamiyan*, and I held tightly to her arm as we made our way along the sidewalk and then across some bricks. No mobility problems at all. I sat down on the straight-back chair, after I padded the back with my jacket and found a comfortable way of sitting on the chair. No back pain, not even any rib pain. We were the only customers in the place for the time we were there, and my lamb shank and dilled rice was just the lunch I wanted. I couldn't think of a better lunch to order to test my physical well being. There is no way that a person with nausea could eat a lunch of lamb shank and dilled rice. I felt no vestiges of nausea. Michele had the same thing she always orders, a plate of vegetarian dumplings (*Ashak*) in a reddish sauce. I drank plenty of house Persian tea and had a plate of baklava for dessert. Michele had Turkish coffee for her dessert. There was a time not so long ago when I was so low, both physically and emotionally that I had the thought that we'd never make it back to *Bamiyan* for a lunch. I am learning to not think that way. I don't want to think magically either, but some balance of each.

As we drove away from *Bamiyan*, I had the thought that the Antique Mall was directly in our path home and that it would be fun to stop there and poke around a bit. I immediately thought that I was pushing things. Better to enjoy what we have done, than to try to do too much. No longer am I the guy who can do it all day after day. I must

pace myself. Be content with the perfection that has already taken place. I say nothing as Michele drives us past the Antique Mall. I don't feel a twinge of regret.

Michele got a text message from Allie that the dance competition was going on forever and that she was really looking forward to it being over so she could come home and see us. We'll get to see her later. She'll be home to eat.

### **Later**

Allie made it home and expressed that she'd been gone so long she'd gotten homesick. She ate her teriyaki dinner and later the three of us watched the current *Monk* together. A good time was had by all of us. I sat in my brown Zero Gravity chair and had a perfect view of the TV, no back pain and no rib pain in evidence. I was even able to get up and down from the chair with a minimum of fuss, just using that weird cane that my MIL had provided me weeks ago. I was now able to walk the length of the house freely without the use of the walker. Of course, there are plenty of things for me to reach out to if I felt the need to stabilize myself in the course of my passage.

### **Sunday / 8 February 2009**

I spent a quiet day recovering my energy from the big Saturday exploits. I watched golf, talked to my son, Joaquin, on the phone, ate some good meals, one of which I prepared, and took it easy. It was great fun to be able to cook a breakfast of fried potatoes and fried eggs, and to serve it to Michele. Just like the old days. I got in a good nap during the slow parts of the golf event I watched. Actually most of it was a bit on the slow side.

### **Monday / 9 February 2009**

Today Michele and I will drive down to Tacoma so I can have one more radiation treatment. I hope I remember to mention to the young women in charge of my treatment that the word I couldn't remember last Friday was "recalcitrant." I've even written myself a note. This situation reminds me of that old *Readers' Digest* series, "Word Power." I think I'll never forget now that the Latin root means to kick up one's heels, as at an authority figure. But I know better. I first learned this in high school in Mary Lou

Schmidt's Greek and Latin root class, and forgot it some years later. So I am likely to forget it again, if I have time enough.

### **Later**

Only two more radiation treatments left now. Today's treatment went by the numbers. I entered the treatment room without my walker for the first time, aided only by the cane my MIL gave me. I really didn't even need it. I informed the two young women who were about to place me on the "bed of pain" that the word from last week was "recalcitrant" and that it derived from the Latin word meaning to kick one's heels up, as at an authority figure. After that piece of didacticism was over, I was once again flat on my back on the metal table, and the two began positioning me perfectly as a target of the rays. Once I was positioned, they left the room as usual and the buzzing and clicking began and the huge machines remotely moved themselves into position and did their thing. Soon the young women were back, and they allowed me, as usual, to grip their upper arms as they hoisted me off of my back (I always find myself thinking of Kafka's story about the Big Bug when this was happening) and stood me on my feet. I took my leave, promising to return tomorrow. And that was that. We drove back home and began preparations for my sister's arrival.

### **Tuesday / 10 February 2009**

Today Jim L. will arrive at my house at 11:30, and he and I will head down I-5 for Tacoma and the Tacoma Radiation Center. After today, I'll have just one more radiation treatment left. After today's treatment, Jim and I will go to the Black Angus Restaurant in Federal Way and eat a lunch prematurely celebrating the end of my radiation treatments. I might get a great slab of rich, red meat, with some potatoes or French fries. That will depend on how lusty my appetite is when I am confronting the menu. I have cast aside my walker and am now getting along fine with just a cane, so my passage from the car to the entrance of the restaurant will be much easier than it would have been just last week. I continue to be amazed at how quickly I experience ups and downs as a result of this MM. I have to remind myself to live in the moment, to enjoy

that moment, and to not make many long range plans based on how I feel at this very moment. It's hard to break with the habits of a lifetime. But I must try.

While I am gone to Tacoma, my sister Leanne is going to make herself useful around the house and deal with putting a new bag in the upright vacuum cleaner, cleaning out the freezer in the garage fridge and a couple of other little things. Good for her. Thanks, Sis!

### **Later**

I made it back home after today's treatment and lunch with Jim. The treatment went smoothly. I got to listen to Stevie Wonder today, and I had a brief meeting with the radiation doctor. Then Jim and I drove to Federal Way to Billy McHale's and ate lunch. I decided to test my nausea by ordering the bodacious BBQ platter with a stuffed baked potato and a side of baked beans. Jim got a steak. I stuffed myself without any untoward twinges and ordered a custard for dessert. Jim had the biggest ice cream sundae I ever saw that rested on a bed of brownies and Oreo cookies. He couldn't finish his dessert, but I finished mine. Then he drove me home and did more trouble shooting on our computers. My sister had replaced the bulbs in the hallway light fixtures which I'd always thought were frosted or clouded or something that caused the light they gave to be dim, dim, dim. I discovered that when they were washed, by my sister, the light fixtures are cut, beveled glass and that with new bulbs in them they really brighten up the hallway. I had no idea. I was shocked. I turned them on and stood and stared at them in disbelief. Later, I'll check the freezer in the garage fridge and I expect to see major differences there, too. Now I'll deal with my mail.

### **Wednesday / 11 February 2009**

Today is the last of my radiation treatments in this series. More might come later, of course. Michele and I will celebrate the end of this series of 12 by eating at Peanut Sauce in Tacoma, one of our favorite Thai restaurants. I am looking forward to their crispy chicken dish. That's a good reward for this 12<sup>th</sup> time of assuming the treatment position on the hard metal bed of pain. Thanks to the treatments, I will be entering the office assisted only by a cane, no walker necessary. When these treatments started I

could barely make it from the car to the office with the walker, but now I could do that passage without the cane, if I so wished. Because my left knee tends to come and go, I will stick with the cane for a while and see how things go.

### **Later**

Today's radiation treatment took almost no time. The set up and the treatment were swift. I was handed a certificate of completion by the staff who cared for me and a nice coffee cup that had the words, "Health, Healing, Hope" written on the side. Michele and I immediately departed for Tacoma's waterfront because today was a clear, sunny day, and we wanted to eat lunch at C. I. Shenanigan's and enjoy the view of the water and Vashon Island. It's hard to believe that a week and a half ago, I thought it possible that I'd never be able to eat lunch with Michele there again. We parked right in front in a handicapped parking place, but I walked over to the restaurant and up the stairs unaided, no walker, no cane. I have learned a lesson from this. Things go up and down, and nothing need last.

Daniel was our waitperson as usual and we had a great time talking with him and eating our sandwiches and sharing a giant piece of cheesecake drizzled with raspberry and strawberry syrup. I spent more time ogling my beautiful young wife than I did looking at Vashon Island, but that's fine. Now I am home and about to go through my mail. I have a copy of the latest *War, Literature & the Arts Journal*, and it looks as though there will be plenty of Vietnam War related stuff in that journal for me to read. I guess I'll never get my fill of that subject.

### **Later yet**

The first thing I turned to in WLA was a commentary by my friend Bill Ehrhart about the writing of another friend of mine, John Balaban. Two pages into that commentary, I encountered these words. "Years before Agent Orange was widely acknowledged for the silent killer it is—the deadly seed sown in Asia only to take root at home among those who thought they'd survived—Balaban wrote in "Along the Mekong":

With a scientific turn of mind I can understand

That malformation of lab mice may not occur in children  
But when, last week, I ushered hare-lipped, tusk-toothed kids  
To surgery in Saigon, I wondered, what they had drunk  
That I had drunk.

Food for thought, indeed. As I am currently fighting multiple myeloma which VA literature assures me is Agent Orange connected and that eligibility for a disability claim is presumptive for those Vietnam Veterans who served in areas in Vietnam where they were exposed to these agents, I feel a kinship with those kids, and with Balaban and his wonderment about having drunk the same stuff that produced those anomalies in those kids. I submitted a claim for a disability to the VA many months ago, based on the above and have yet to hear one word from them that assures me that the VA is accepting responsibility for my disease. I know what I drank in Vietnam, especially at Long Binh where the water came from a creek that was much polluted by dioxins. I bathed daily in the same water. What's taking the VA so long to acknowledge these connections? I will never know, because the process is mysterious and secret, with no accountability and no deadlines. As they say, it takes time to adjudicate every claim. As others say, the VA's policy is to wait for the Army to die. The last seems cynical, but the thought sticks with me. I think it's about time for me to contact Senator Patty Murray and ask for her help. I wanted to think the process would work for me, but it's not working.

#### **Thursday / 12 February 2009**

It's a weird feeling to be up and working on email, but to know that I don't have a trip to Tacoma today for another radiation treatment. I have no pain in my back, and I get no spasms when I move about or at any other time. I am convinced that the radiation treatments eliminated the pain and the spasms. My back still feels tender and vulnerable, which is good, as those feelings prevent me from going hog wild with tendencies to do stuff that I used to do, such as going out in the backyard and getting my hands on the shovel and shoveling dog poop. I suspect that such an activity would put me back in the hospital in jig time. I also must watch my tendency to want to do things that are too low for me to reach. I have the grabber and when I drop a sock on

the floor, I resort to using the grabber to retrieve it. I remember leaning over months ago to pick something up, and that's when I heard a pop in my back, and shortly thereafter, the back spasms began to bedevil me. I don't want that to happen again. Of course, I am not sure what I might do or not do that could cause those spasms to return. So I am sort of living suspended on tenterhooks. I need to be careful, but it's hard to know just exactly what careful consists of.

### **Friday / 13 February 2009**

Today, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, would be a good day for me to get a letter from the VA telling me that my disability claim has been adjudicated and that I have been granted 100% disability for my Agent Orange connected multiple myeloma. It's been about four months since I first contacted the VA informing them that I have multiple myeloma and that my reading of the VA literature indicated that eligibility for the above was presumptive. How long should it take for the VA to adjudicate presumptive eligibility? As I commented at the time, it should be an open-and-shut case. I think that four months is long enough for me to be patient. Now I think I should begin getting restless and unpleasant to deal with. I'll dig deep for those characteristics. Meanwhile, when I get my mail each day, the first thing I do is dig through the pile of bills and magazines for that letter from the VA that seems less and less likely to ever arrive. More and more, I find myself thinking of that phrase I read about what the VA's policy towards veterans seems to be. Waiting for the Army to die. Well, I feel pretty damned good today. I feel as though I might be able to outwait the VA, even for a year or two. You'd think that would give the VA enough time to adjudicate my claim, as simple as it is.

### **Later**

Michele and I went to Target to buy a shower curtain for Allie's bathroom. That mildewed curtain is the only sour note in an otherwise perfect little room. This is the first shopping expedition I have been on in months. I pushed a cart so that I'd have something to hang onto, but once I picked out the curtain, I was so tired that I made my way over to the in store café and sat down at a table and waited for Michele to finish

shopping. I realized that if a short trip to Target exhausts me like this, I am not ready to fly to Mesa AZ to visit with my mother.

When we got home the mail arrived, but no letter from the VA. I wasn't surprised at all, but I was disappointed. It's about time that they sent me another letter telling me that they are working on adjudicating my case, etc. When Michele left for work, I took a long nap in my Zero Gravity chair. Before I nodded off, I thought about my VVA rep, Roosevelt Ward, and I resolved that on Monday I would contact him and see what he knows about my VA claim and its progress.

### **Saturday / 14 February 2009**

I got a nice call from my Aunt Nellie Mae thanking me for the flowers I had delivered to her for Valentine's Day. She expressed worry about how I am doing. I assured her that I was bouncing back well as a result of my radiation treatments and that I was hopeful that in a week or two I could drive down to see her and take her out to breakfast at the Pine Cone Inn, the way I had been doing for years every couple of weeks or so. I really miss seeing Nellie Mae, but the past few months I have not had much mobility. I am convinced that if I am both lucky and careful, it's not impossible that I might resume that activity. Maybe in two weeks. We'll see. I've learned to not make any real long-range plans. While I was talking to Nellie Mae on the phone, the guys from Carol's flowers delivered the roses that I'd ordered for Michele for Valentine's Day. I went a bit overboard on the roses, but I told myself, Maybe this would be my last Valentine's Day. Of course, it might not be. Anyhow, the roses look great, and I haven't had the opportunity to buy Michele the sort of stuff that I used to get her for Valentine's Day. So roses will do. They are just a small token of appreciation and love for my Angel of Mercy.

### **Later**

Allie and Michele were gone to the high school most of the day as today Allie's dance team is taking part in a competition. Michele was in and out checking on me from time to time. In the evening I was able to watch footage of the events featuring Allie, as Michele had recorded much of her day's activities with a camera, so I got a good sense

of what my girl has been up to with her dance activities these past many weeks. I was quite impressed watching her go through the complicated routines. I also got to see her sing the National Anthem with two other girls. After we watched the dance competition, the three of us watched the latest episode of *Monk*, which we all enjoyed. Poor old Monk always reminds me of myself. He's a frightened soul, but he soldiers on, and does the best he can, and he always gets his man.

### **Sunday / 15 February 2009**

Michele and I drove to the Imperial Gardens at the Great Wall Mall in Kent and ate dim sum, something we've never done before on a Sunday. The place was crowded and I had to stand and wait for a few minutes which was not fun. Michele had dropped me off in front and I used my cane to stabilize myself which worked fine. We soon got a good table for two, and soon after that our tabletop was filled with small dishes of eggplant, ribs, hum bows, octopus, and other delicacies. We chowed down and ordered lots of hum bows to take with us to keep at home for Joaquin to eat when he shows up on Monday. Michele had parked way out in the parking lot, and I walked, slowly, with her to our car, and was gratified that I made it. No near misses. Once I am on my feet, I am pretty stable. It's the transition from sitting to standing that's a challenge for me.

When we got home I took a brief nap to prepare for our next outing, to Bellevue to Whole Foods to buy some of Allie's special foods. It's been months since I've made that trip, but I feel up for it. I don't want to vegetate at home any more than I have to.

### **Later**

We went to Whole Foods in Bellevue. While helping Michele shop for Allie's special gluten-free groceries, I had the thought that this was the first time I've been in a supermarket in weeks, many weeks. I enjoyed being there. I bought a cooking magazine that had some good recipes that I will try, especially one for chicken thighs, which I have been looking for an excuse to cook for dinner one of these days. I used a grocery cart for support while I was in the market, but when I used the restroom it was gone when I came out, so I used my cane to make it (barely) over to where the overzealous grocery clerk put the cart, and I retrieved it and was once again stable

enough to make it through the aisles. Whole Foods wasn't as busy as I'd feared it would be on a Sunday, so crowds weren't a problem. I made it back to our vehicle, and loaded myself in. It's easier to get in and out of the Ford Freestar than the CR-V, so that's why Michele drove the Ford today. It was a big day for me, but it worked out.

When we got home, Allie was watching *Saving Private Ryan* with a friend. Joaquin called and we talked briefly. I am really looking forward to his visit tomorrow. Maybe I'll be in good enough shape to go to a movie with the family. That's my hope. I want to see *Gran Torino*. It's been at the top of my must-see list for weeks.

### **Monday / 16 February 2009**

Today's big adventure is my scheduled trip to Auburn so Cheryl can cut my hair and trim my beard. I have hopes that will all go fine. But I am always on edge about going to Auburn, as I consider Auburn one of the most dangerous towns in the state. I am always relieved to leave the city limits of Auburn behind me. Because I lived in Auburn for so many years, there are still things that I feel I must go to Auburn to get. My dentist has his office there, Cheryl's barbershop is there, and the place I buy bags for my vacuum cleaner is also located there. I think that's all. Auburn is not a town I think fondly of.

### **Later**

Michele and I made it into and back out of Auburn safe and sound. Michele shopped at Safeway for groceries while I got my hair cut and my beard trimmed by Cheryl. Cheryl was shocked at the first sight of me, as I slowly made my way into her shop, supported by my cane. She asked if I'd had a heart attack. I told her what I did have, and commented that I would have preferred a heart attack. Cheryl and I have known each other since the early 1970's, and she's been cutting my hair for over 35 years. I don't think I've had my hair cut by anyone else in that length of time more than perhaps a half a dozen times. As she cut my hair we talked about all the usual stuff we used to talk about, as well as indulging in some discussion about what my prospects are. After about an hour and a half, Michele came to retrieve me, and I paid Cheryl and

said my goodbyes. I told her that I hoped to see her again in a couple of months. Of course, one never knows.

Michele drove me back home, and on the way she told me that I no longer looked like a deeply troubled Vietnam veteran, but more like my old self. I hope this change in my appearance doesn't work against me tomorrow when I have my appointment at the Seattle VA Hospital with a VA doctor. I am going to try to make my case that the VA should be paying for my medication, no matter how much money Michele earned last year when she was still employed as a principal. I still don't understand why last year's salary is the determiner of eligibility for getting chemo paid for by the VA. Last year's salary is gone. How can I spend that money for medication? When I asked those questions, I was just told, *Those are the rules*. Okay. I guess I get it. They don't want to help. Why doesn't the VA just say that? "We don't want to help you. We just want to wait for you to die." That would be refreshing honesty to hear that. But I won't hold my breath waiting for honesty of any kind.

### **Later yet**

I woke up from a short nap, and Allie was looking at me expectantly. "What's up?" I asked. "Hypothetically, if the toilet got plugged up and I used the plunger to get it to not overflow but if the water still didn't go completely out of the toilet, what should I do next?" she asked. More plunging, I told her. Lots more plunging, of the vigorous, repeated variety, until all the water goes out of the toilet. Okay, she said. I suspected that her question was real-world oriented. She came back in a few minutes and told me that those instructions helped. Now she wanted to know what to do to clean the plunger. I advised her to get the Clorox and to carefully pour some in the toilet, and then rinse the plunger in the toilet and wipe it off with paper towels. She did all that without misadventure. Later, I used my walker to get down that long hall to her bathroom for an inspection. Everything looked hunky dory. I was proud of my girl. In the recent past, I would have been the one who would have been called in to take charge. No longer can I do that stuff, so Allie has stepped up. I felt both a sense of loss, and a sense of relief that things can go on without me, and that those things will be fine. I am making slow progress in accepting the inevitable course of the MM.

### **Even more later**

My old friend Dan Duffy called to chat and we had a nice long conversation about things. He asked me when it was that we first met, and the best I can remember it was back in the late 1980's at a Vietnam War related program at a Popular Culture Conference. Twenty years ago. I was about the age he is now, mid 40's. Dan is the editor of the Viet Nam Literature Project and the most recent newsletter mentions me. "David Willson Sick" is the headline. It goes on to say:

David Willson, the Army veteran whose REMF novels select the most petty aspects of life with the majority of US troops, in the rear, is succumbing to multiple myeloma, the consequence of duty at Long Binh, even today a dioxin hot spot. He is writing up the experience in a sequel to classic novels, *In the Army Now*, *REMF Diary*, and *The REMF Returns*, the manuscript entitled "REMF Diary of Dying and Bureaucratic Complexity." Write to David at 23630 201<sup>st</sup> Ave SE, Maple Valley, WA 98038.

It'll be interesting to see if any of the 200 or so subscribers to the newsletter do write me. I won't hold my breath, but I will respond if any do reach out to me. It was kind of Dan to put that mention of me and my books in his newsletter. Thanks, Dan.

### **Tuesday / 17 February 2009**

Joaquin showed up last night in time for all of us to watch a movie together, *Appaloosa*, which we all enjoyed, even though the color kept cutting in and out. After the movie, Michele heated up some of the hum bows that we got at Imperial Gardens and Joaquin and I ate some of them as a late night snack. Today's big adventure is our trip into the Seattle VA Hospital so that I can get an assignment of a primary care physician. I was told when I set up the appointment that I'd be sent in the mail a set of forms to fill out to bring with me the day of the appointment. The forms never came, and I am not surprised that they didn't. I suspect that they were sent out on time, but sent to the wrong name and address, and they just didn't get to me. I hope that our showing up

without the forms today will not set the doctor's teeth on edge too much. I am trying to remember what the instructions were for where we were supposed to report at that huge VA Hospital. I didn't pay much attention to the details, as I was told that all of that would be included in the letter that I'd receive confirming the appointment. I guess it's possible we'll show up there today at 1:00 to see the doctor, and nobody will know anything about us. If that happens, and it might, I guess the best attitude I can have is to consider the experience good for the narrative. Of course, it's a big trip into Seattle and not a comfortable one either. Just parking at the Seattle VA Hospital and getting past the fencing and barricades to the building itself is a major operation. Finding the place we are supposed to report at 1:00 could be near impossible. I remember being told to enter the hospital at the "Emergency entrance" and to take the elevator to the next floor up, but after that I have no idea what I am supposed to do. It would have helped to get those forms in the mail. This sort of slipshod lack of follow through is getting to be familiar to us when dealing with the VA. In a few hours we'll be battling our way through the maze.

### **Later**

Tuesday's adventure went fine. We left the house at 11:30, even though our appointment wasn't until 1:00. In about thirty minutes we were looking for a handicapped parking place at the VA Hospital. There were plenty to choose from for a change. We found a close in parking place, and I got out of the Freestar and Michele placed my walker for me to grasp while I got myself out of the Ford. It's much easier for me to get in and out of the Freestar than it is to get in and out of Michele's much lower Honda CR-V. I like riding in her car because it's brand new and because of the Sirius radio station, and the seat warmers, but the Ford is more comfortable for me. As close as we were to the hospital, there was still a lot of rough pavement and uneven sidewalk for me to negotiate.

We'd left so early because the forms that we were supposed to get in the mail, to fill out in advance, never arrived. After I got myself along the rough pavement to the front of the hospital, hitting many cracks that stopped me cold and jarred my spine painfully, we approached the Emergency entrance which is where I'd been told to enter

the building, and then take the elevator to the second floor. We did that, and entered a spacious waiting room, filled with old veterans who looked to be in worse shape than I. Many were in wheel chairs and many had canes and walkers. I checked in, explained about the paperwork and was given a sheaf of forms on a clipboard to fill out. We looked around for a comfortable place to sit and found at the far end of the room a place with a great view of Seattle. The chairs were all low and not comfortable. There were no higher chair options, unlike the waiting rooms at Group Health which all have high chair options.

I sat down and began filling out the forms. These forms asked all the same questions that I've answered on countless other VA forms. They want to know about my medications, about my disease, about my exposure to Agent Orange, about my mental and emotional state and so on. I answered them all as best I could and then turned them back in. Soon we were called, and the process of being assigned a Primary Care Physician began. We met with Jan for our first part of the three part process. She was a nurse who took my vital signs and found that my blood pressure was high. She told us about the process and was informative and kind. She told me how great I looked. Compared to the other old veterans in the waiting room, she was right. I told her that I'd been hearing that all my life, but I was grateful to hear it again. I also mentioned that looking good and feeling good were two different things.

She explained that next we'd meet with Mike, the pharmacist, and that he'd discuss the options available to us in starting the process to get the VA to pay for my chemo, chemo which has in the past three months cost us over \$10,000. Soon we were in a small and very nicely appointed room waiting for Mike to call us into his office. I was impressed with the rooms and the quality of the furnishings. This VA hospital is very different from the VA hospital portrayed in *Born on the Fourth of July*, and the place is staffed with folks who are concerned and helpful. So far.

Our interview with Mike went well, and resulted in a sheaf of forms for us to fill out to move to the next step in getting my chemo paid for by the VA. Mike seemed to be hopeful that the process would eventually allow me to continue to receive medical care from Group Health, and also have the prescriptions written or rewritten and filled by the VA. He explained in great detail how that process would work. Of course, we must first

get a PCP assigned to me, and also I must have an appointment with a VA oncologist. We are interested in that because we think that the VA oncology department must have a lot of experience in dealing with veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and then subsequently contracted multiple myeloma. The VA hospital does have a large department dedicated to bone marrow transplants which is a possible next step for me.

After we parted from Mike, we went across the hall to our appointment with Dr. Franks. She went through the stuff again, from the doctor angle, and explained that next we would get a referral to oncology. Okay. That appointment would be a month or two out. Okay again. First, though, today, I must have blood work. We put up a token resistance, mentioning my being blood-worked half to death by Group Health, and my being anemic but we soon caved in, as we could see this was a hoop that had to be jumped through. As we took our leave of Dr. Franks, she patted me kindly on the shoulder and said that she wished me well and was glad to meet with me. I appreciated that gesture. I always like being patted by a lovely young woman.

We went around the corner to the lab, and in a minute or two my number, number 63, came up, and I was sitting on a chair, rolling up my sleeves and the blood work was done. The gentleman knew what he was doing, and the process was as pleasant as it could be. I am somewhat of an authority on blood work by now. I met up with Michele and we had just one more thing to do before leaving, handing over the packet of stuff that included the information about the blood work.

We went to a nearby desk, where we'd been directed to go and dealt with the only impolite and not helpful person we encountered on this trip to the VA Hospital. The women glanced at the packet and started asking me about a blood work number, and why it wasn't on a form in the packet. I had no answer for her. I excused myself at that point, and hobbled over to the nearby restroom using my walker, and went through that process. When I returned, Michele had finished up whatever was needed with that lady, and we went to the elevator and went down to the first floor, and I made my way across the acres of rough sidewalk and pavement to our car. When we got to our Ford, Michele realized that she didn't have the envelope with all the forms and information sheets that we'd been given in our three interviews. So I waited for her while she raced back to the hospital to see if she could find the packet.

Soon she was back with the envelope, and we were on our way home. I did much better this time at the VA Hospital than during the previous trip when I was in so much pain, that I couldn't even consider going through the blood work and the other requirements for the Agent Orange Registry. As weak and sensitive as my back is, the radiation treatments did eliminate the spasms and the worst of the pain. So that's progress of a sort. In thirty minutes we were back in Maple Valley, where we stopped briefly to pick up some short ribs, rice and gyoza at our favorite teriyaki place, and soon after that I was home, sitting at our kitchen table, eating short ribs and going through my mail. I had received the new Fred Eaglesmith CD, and also two Roy Milton CDs. The one I was waiting for most eagerly, was the Howlin' Wolf live in Germany 1964 CD, which had a long version of Jimmy Oden's song "Goin' Down Slow" which I love and which I identify with. Soon I was listening to it. The sound on some of the songs wasn't great, but on "Goin' Down Slow" the sound was great and the song was great. It made me laugh and cry. It fits my situation perfectly and Wolf does the song proud.

Later in the day, Joaquin and I watched *Duck You Sucker* which he'd given me for Christmas, and we had great fun watching Rod Steiger and James Coburn fight their way through a Mexican revolution, with dynamite exploding often. It was a sad kiss goodbye to the Old West, as modern technology made killing so much easier. Lots of machine gun activity, huge fireballs, train wrecks and mass murder. Mostly though it was a story about the developing relationship and friendship between the two main characters. I couldn't figure out why I hadn't seen this film before, but it was a great pleasure to watch the movie with my son.

Then we ate dinner with Michele and Allie, gobbling up bowls of chili. Joaquin left for Ellensburg shortly after dinner, and later Michele and I watched an episode of that Dennis Leary series about firefighting in NYC. The name of it escapes me at this moment. I have the four seasons now on DVD, so Michele and I have plenty to watch in the evenings when we want to watch something on TV. The fifth season starts soon, but we won't be ready for it, as we have too much of the first four seasons to watch. Eventually we'll get that season on DVD, too. Or not.

**Wednesday / 18 February 2009**

Today is a quiet, stay at home day for me. I got an email from my old friend, Steve C. who I worked with at Green River Community College for thirty years. He kindly offered to visit with me at my home, and he even volunteered to do some tasks for me that have been left undone. I let him know that next week was shaping up to be good for that, if his calendar permitted, and that my garage floor currently was playing host to a few plastic storage tubs full of Christmas stuff that needed to be returned to the attic, and that if he was willing, I would be grateful if he'd put that stuff back up in the attic. That's always been my assigned duty, but I am under orders to climb no ladders, and some days one step is a challenge for me. So perhaps that can happen next week, and then the garage will be in shape to have another vehicle parked in it. Right now, Allie is parking her Honda CR-V in the garage, but my Ford sits on the lawn, and Michele's CR-V is parked in the driveway, where it often has frost on the windshield in the morning.

### **Later**

I got a call from Armi who identified herself as the oncology nurse at the VA Hospital. I hadn't expected to hear anything from the VA oncology department this fast, so I was happy to hear that she was eager to set up an oncology appointment for me so that I could find out what the VA had to offer me for my multiple myeloma. She asked where I was being treated currently for my disease and I told her that I was receiving treatment from Group Health and that my oncologist is Dr. Kurt Norman. She indicated that it would be necessary for the VA oncology department to obtain all of the Group Health oncology records so that they could take stock of my situation. I explained that I had recently had Group Health send those records to the Agent Orange Directory which is located in the same building that she's located in, and that I thought she should be able to access those records, so that it would not be necessary to once again go through duplicating motions. She said that she would try to locate those records at the Seattle VA Hospital, but that if she couldn't find them there, she'd contact me again and ask me to call Group Health and have them forward another set of those records to the Seattle VA oncology department. I said that I'd be happy to do so. She instructed me to

write down her name and her phone number, and she told me how important it was for me to keep track of her name and number. Okay, I will do that.

### **Later yet**

Before Michele and Allie left the house, they put out the stuff that I needed to cook dinner. I had planned to cook chicken for dinner, using a recipe from the issue of *Fine Cooking* that I'd bought when Michele and I were at Whole Foods on the weekend. I figured I was in good enough shape to do so, if all the ingredients and the pots and pans I needed were arranged on the top of the kitchen counter. I started cooking dinner at 4:00 and I soon realized that I'd forgotten to ask Michele or Allie to retrieve the carrots from the fridge. There was no way I could squat down to get the drawer open and get out the carrots, but I had to have them. So I got a couple of my yardsticks from my yardstick collection and used them to wedge open the drawer, finally getting it open enough to access the bags of vegetables stored there. I used my grabber to pull out each bag and inspect it. I found mushrooms, which I decided to use in my recipe, but no carrots. Wrong drawer. So I put the bags back in the drawer and kicked it shut and tried the other drawer, using the yardsticks and the grabber again. I did find the bag of carrots, and put it on the top of the counter.

I started off by browning the chicken thighs and wings in oil, after I rolled them in flour. Right as I was in the middle of the browning process, my mother called, returning my call from earlier in the day. I told her that I was in the middle of cooking chicken for dinner. She assumed that I must be doing great if I was cooking dinner. I explained that I was doing okay, but I didn't go into details about the pain or "discomfort" that I was having in my lower right back when I tried to get up and down. Nor did I mention that I was apprehensive that if the pain continued, I was going to have trouble walking, even with my walker. I was doing fine at that moment, standing at the kitchen counter, with the counter to hang onto in front of me, and the other counter with the kitchen sink behind me for support if needed. We talked for a while, and I did managed to slice up fresh ginger to add to the chicken in the pan, while I was on the phone. We didn't talk long, as I think my chopping and the sizzling chicken made my mother nervous, but we did chat. Then I finished up the recipe, adding the mushrooms, the onion and the

carrots. Then I poured on some chicken broth and put the lid on the chicken, setting the fry pan at about 200 degrees and I returned to my Zero Gravity chair. When in the chair I feel pretty good, as the pain in my lower right back gradually fades.

Later the girls returned home and Michele made the brown rice and we then ate dinner. The chicken dish turned out great, just like in the old days, when I cooked dinner pretty much every night. It made me feel good to have been able to cook the dinner, but I also wondered how much longer I'd be able to do so. I had to remind myself that I must take each day as it comes. Later Michele and I watched an episode of *Rescue Me*, one of those in which a fireman dies. The show was a reminder of how fragile our mortality is. I didn't really need such a reminder. Then I levered myself up out of the Zero Gravity chair in the living room, with much discomfort and made my way with my walker to the family room where I sleep every night in that Zero Gravity chair. I took my nightly thalidomide and wondered if when I awoke in the morning, I'd be able to get myself up and walk around my house. I thought about the possibility of a wheelchair in my near future, and hoped that wasn't going to be necessary.

#### **Thursday / 19 February 2009**

I took my time this morning about trying to get out of my chair, but when the moment came, I was able to do so. Not without a lot of discomfort, though. I made my way to my computer and lowered myself into the chair. I was able to discern greater discomfort today while sitting in the chair that I'd felt yesterday. As I sat in the chair, the discomfort gradually faded, but every once in a while I felt twinges that I hadn't felt yesterday. I find myself being over attentive to little twinges and to tend to think of them as warnings of bad things to come. Ignoring them isn't a good idea, but on the other hand, I don't want to obsess about them. It's hard to strike a balance.

#### **Later**

I got a call from Armi, the VA oncology nurse. She said that she'd tried to find copies of my Group Health records in the records center at the VA Hospital and failed to find any. She said that when she asked about my records being sent there, she was told they'd probably been thrown away if they hadn't been sent in the proper manner. She

said that probably the easiest thing to do would be for me to contact my oncologist, Dr. Kurt Norman and ask him to send complete copies of my medical records to the VA oncology department. I told her I was willing to do that, but that she should contact Leigh Hayes in the Agent Orange Directory Office, and Ms Hayes told me just a few weeks ago that she had received complete copies of those Group Health records from Dr. Norman's office. Armi asked me to spell out Leigh Hayes name, which I did. She said she'd try to locate Ms Hayes and ask her if she could have copies of the records. Armi said she'd call me again if this effort failed to produce the needed records.

I have to admit to a certain cynicism taking hold of me as I continue to submit multiple copies of the same medical records over and over to various offices of the VA. The old cliché about the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing leaped into my mind. I also thought of the many times I've filled out VA forms asking the same questions as the previous set of VA forms that I filled out. Are they getting these forms together and comparing them to see if my answers are consistent? Naw, there's no way these different offices of the VA could coordinate such an effort. Every time I visit a new office, another set of forms has to be filled out. *Those are the rules.*

I do wonder what Armi will have to say to me the next time she calls. Will she say that now is the time I must finally contact Dr. Norman's office and request another complete set of medical records be sent to another VA office, or will she say that Leigh Hayes coughed up the records and everything is now fine, and schedule my VA oncology appointment? The suspense is killing me. Well, something is.

### **Friday / 20 February 2009**

Armi, the VA oncology nurse, called me first thing this morning. She's been unable to contact Leigh Hayes of the Agent Orange Registry Office to get copies of my Group Health medical records. She has called her and she has emailed her and gotten no response. So she wants me to contact Dr. Norman's oncology office and ask them for the records. Okay. I told her that I would do that. She further told me that I have a scheduled appointment at the VA Hospital next Tuesday at 2:45 with an oncology doctor. She said that he was the very best oncology doctor, and that she said that not

because she worked with him, but because he truly was. Armi is highly motivated to get me into the VA Oncology Department.

I called Leigh Hayes but didn't get her. The person who answered the phone said that Leigh Hayes wasn't in today, but would be back on Monday. That's why she hasn't responded to Armi's efforts to contact her. I was told by the person who answered the phone that she would email Leigh Hayes about my request, and leave her a note as well.

After that call, Michele called Group Health and talked to Dr. Norman's nurse, who said that she could have a complete set of my medical records for us to pick up on Monday, and then we could take them with us to the VA Oncology appointment on Tuesday. How many sets of complete Group Health records is this that we've requested, received and sent or taken to the VA? I've lost track. We are eager to please the VA Oncology Department, both for the possibility that we might get my chemo paid for, but also because we might learn something further about what protocols might help my condition and help me fight the MM. After all, the VA must be dealing with many veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and have contracted multiple myeloma. Certainly, another opinion from another oncologist could be a good thing. I am positively impressed with Armi's high energy and her promptness in communicating with me. I wish I were getting that sort of communication from the part of the VA that's busy adjudicating my disability claim.

### **Later**

I got a call from Leigh Hayes in the VA Agent Orange Directory Office. She said that she and her office no longer have the Group Health medical records. She said that she gave the records to the Agent Orange doctor, and that he reviewed them and then sent them along to the regional office, as I have a claim that's being adjudicated. Unless he also sent the records to the records center to be filed, these records are no longer in the building. Leigh Hayes was very gracious and said that she would check to see if the records were still in the building and that she'd get back to me about that. I am glad that we have already initiated the process of getting yet another set of copies of my Group Health medical records for the VA oncology department.

Michele came home with the mail, and she told me that I had a letter from the VA. We opened it up and it was the results of my recent VA blood work. It informed me that I had "low blood count likely from recent surgery and myeloma." No surprise about that. We knew that already. But it's good to know that the VA is eager to communicate with us about my multiple myeloma.

### **Saturday / 21 February 2009**

Allie left early this morning for a day of dance. Michele kept me company in the morning and then left to get her mother and then go wherever it was that Allie was dancing so they could watch the event. Allie and her dance team were taking part in an all-day dance competition that I could not attend due to my condition. I was on my own for the afternoon, and occupied myself by reading Tobey Herzog's book of interviews with Larry Heinemann, Robert Olen Butler, Tim O'Brien and Phil Caputo. I started with the interviews with Butler and Heinemann, as I know them the best. I've met Tim O'Brien several times, but he doesn't know me from Adam's ox. I've never even been in the same room with Caputo, who moves in a much more rarified atmosphere than any I've ever breathed. I think that both Heinemann and Butler might even recognize my name if it were mentioned to them. But I may be kidding myself. I am a mighty small fish in the Vietnam veteran author pond. One fact I liked that Butler mentioned is that only 18% of the men who served in the military in Vietnam saw combat. I guess Butler could be called a REMF, certainly when compared to the other three authors.

I also spent much of the day watching Phil Mickelson put on a golf clinic for the others competing with him this weekend. He could do no wrong, and scored a 62, one stroke better than his opening day score of 63. The day was a weird one for me, because when I decided it was time for me to take my shower, there was no water. Okay, I can wait until it comes back on. At least I got some good mail today, and I have enjoyed listening to the new CDs. I ate the yoghurt and fresh fruit that Michele, my Angel of Mercy, prepared for me before she left, and I also heated up the two left-over slices of pizza and gobbled them down, aided by a tall glass of San Pellagrino water. I heard the water come back on, so I guess I will measure how my current physical situation is by making the effort to take a shower and dress myself. Yesterday I was

very shaky during this process, but I made it without falling down, although by the time I was reassembled, I was as shaky as a leaf in a tree.

In the early evening, Michele and Allie returned home, and they had taken video footage of Allie's part in the dance competition which they showed me. I was grateful for the chance to get to see what Allie had been preparing for all these long months when she left the house each morning in the dark to go to the high school to train for this event. Allie looked great. I miss being able to go to see her do this stuff, as for the past 16 years, I've always been there to witness whatever it was that she was taking part in. Allie has always loved being busy, and learning new things. Seeing this video is as close as I am going to get to watching her do this dance routine with props. She and her team members were wearing French maid costumes, and using props such as laundry baskets as then went through their Busby Berkley-like routines. Amazing stuff, like nothing I saw 50 years ago when I was in high school. Times have changed.

Sunday / 22 February 2009

Michele is gone to Auburn to attend a class in how to score lacrosse games, and Allie and I are at home, waiting for golf to come on at 12:00. Phil Mickelson has found his golf game and leads the tournament by four strokes, so I am looking forward to sitting in my Zero Gravity chair for a few hours watching Phil try to hang on to his lead. My prediction is that he will do what it takes. Michele will show up early in this round to watch the tournament with me, and she'll also take the time to prepare a large bowl of Nancy's Yogurt for me with a topping of large quantities of brightly colored fruit, which should include blueberries, strawberries and Kiwis.

Maybe between now and the start of the tournament, I'll take my shower and get dressed. Yesterday's efforts in that project went much better than the day before, which makes no sense to me, but in many ways my world has stopped making sense. Today the water is on, which makes showering much easier to plan. I never did learn why our water was off yesterday. In the old days I would have left the house, visited the well pump house and sought out my neighbors to find out why the water wasn't running and also what steps were necessary to make the water run again. Yesterday I just stayed in the house and waited, passively, for the water to come back on again, which it did after

a few hours. It's weird to be doing things so differently than my lifelong patterns, but I have to admit that I can no longer dash outside and make myself the biggest, loudest person on the scene. A certain amount of isolation is the result of my changed physical situation, but I guess I could try a little harder. It's easier right now to just wait and see.

### **Later**

Phil Mickelson found a way to win today, so it was fun to call my mother and talk to her, as Phil is her most favorite golfer to watch. We had a good telephonic conversation about Phil and his tendency to make a tournament exciting just by being himself. He does have a talent for that. He wasn't playing his best game, but he won anyhow. How does he do that? I guess I'll have to add that to the list of mysteries I've been keeping.

### **Monday / 23 February 2009**

Today Michele drove us down to the Tacoma Group Health in the morning so that I could get my blood work done, and so I could pick up the urine collection container for the 24 hour urine collection that I must do this week. My back spasms are back in full force, so when we hit some chuckholes, I felt a spasm of pain in my lower right back that went right down my right leg. Painful, indeed, and the pain made me think that I might decide to have another series of radiation treatments to deal with this. I was told that I could have at least two more series of the treatments for my back pain.

Michele parked the Ford Freestar in a handicapped parking place right in front of Group Health, and I used my walker to make my way to the lab to get the blood work, while Michele went upstairs to Dr. Norman's office to pick up the complete set of medical records for us to take with tomorrow to the VA oncology appointment. She was soon back with the records, and I was soon done with the blood work and I had a large paper bag with the urine collection container in it, under one arm. We were soon back in the Ford and headed home, but not without a few pain spasms on my part, due to the transitions. Just a slight shifting of my body is setting them off, just the way they used to happen, prior to the radiation treatments. Not a good sign, but not a surprise either.

Michele made me a nice sandwich and a bowl of soup for my lunch, before she went to work. This morning's activities have caused me to work up quite a hunger. I made short work of the Thai noodle soup and the white cheddar and salami on rye sandwich. Michele even put a slice of tomato on the sandwich, which I would have been too lazy to do. It's those little touches that make the difference.

## **Tuesday / 24 February 2009**

Last night I went to bed (actually to my Zero Gravity chair) more fatalistically than usual. Because my ankles are swollen, and my vision is blurred again, and my back is in great pain when I try to get up from a chair, I found myself thinking about embolisms and the chance I might be visited by one during the night. I have thought very little about embolisms these past few months, but I was warned by Dr. Norman that they can visit a patient with multiple myeloma who is on the protocol that I am on, and can cause death. I am not clear on how much at risk I am for an embolism, just because my ankles are currently swollen, but the thought did get stuck in my mind. Perhaps at today's appointment with the VA oncologist, I'll bring up this subject as a talking point. It's worth mentioning. Also, I have no clear idea what the signs are for a person who is dying of MM. Am I currently as healthy as I can be, given my situation, or not? I have no clear idea. Many of my numbers seem to have improved since I began the protocols, but those are numbers mostly related to the operation of my kidneys. What do the other numbers mean about my longevity, if anything? I did wake up this morning glad to have made it through another night.

My appointment with the VA oncologist is this afternoon at 2:45, and I have 70 pages of Group Health medical records to hand over to this doctor. Those pages should give him plenty to chew on. I never heard back from Armi, the oncology nurse, about whether or not she'd located copies of my medical records within the VA system. I guess she didn't, but wouldn't I have heard back from her if she didn't? Probably today that question will be answered.