

PSALM 23



THE LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still waters. He
restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths
of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou
art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they
comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the
presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my
head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the
house of the LORD for ever.

King James Version



(This psalm has special significance to Ewe Jin who would recite it silently while going through treatment. And he usually wears the same Psalm 23 T-shirt at the hospital. This picture was taken during a jungle trek to the Lepok waterfalls in June 2012.)

Face to Face with Cancer

Three Journeys... God Always Present

By Soo Ewe Jin & Angeline Lim

**2012 Edition
Revised and updated**

Complimentary:
Not for sale. Pass it on.

First edition 2002

Second edition 2004

Third edition (Chinese) 2006

Fourth edition 2006

Fifth edition 2009

This edition 2012

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*To God,
our Healer,
Rock
and Salvation*

Preface

This little book has gone through five editions, with a total of 12,000 copies printed. The first four editions, including the Chinese edition, focused on my first journey with cancer back in April 1999.

The fifth edition came about because I underwent a second journey with cancer in 2006/2007. It contained new material as well as selected material from the first book.

When the books ran out, I was contemplating reprinting the fifth edition, but I never got round to doing the reprint because in March 2011, I had to battle cancer again.

Every journey for every patient is different. When my wife and I first decided to share our journey – me as a patient, and she as a caregiver – our purpose was to encourage patients and caregivers.

We shared our thoughts, our fears, our joys, and a whole multitude of emotions in a way that we felt would be useful to anyone going through the journey. Most importantly, we shared about how our faith kept us strong.

Our book did not offer advice on the best treatment or the best doctor. But it had plenty to share about family, friends, the diversity of the country, and a truly Wonderful and Loving God.

And we were simply amazed at how far and wide the book went.

There were 12,000 physical copies distributed in total, but in terms of readership, the numbers

were definitely more as we learnt about how the book was passed on from one person to the next.

For this third journey, I had shared much on social media, through email, FaceBook and my blog. It was practically a moment-by-moment, blow-by-blow account, broadcast to family and friends online, from near and far.

But for the book, we have reflected on what we shared earlier and brought it down to a level that we believe will be more readable in book form.

This 6th and latest edition includes our thoughts from the third journey, and also selected articles from the earlier editions. The earlier material are left in their original state, without any editorial updates, as we want to preserve the context in which they were written.

May you be encouraged by this little book. We thank those who have generously contributed to its publication so that we can continue to distribute it freely, for free. Our hope is that you do not hold on to a copy if there is someone you know who has need for it. Do pass it on.

Ewe Jin & Angeline
September 2012

> For the complete earlier editions in pdf format, including the Chinese edition, please visit sooewejin.blogspot.com

About the authors

Soo Ewe Jin and Angeline Lim have been journalists for most of their working lives.

They have, however, taken breaks from their careers to be full-time homemakers.

Ewe Jin's career in *The Star* from 2000 until now has seen him serve in various positions: as Star Online Editor, *Sunday Star* Editor, Special Projects Editor and his current designation as Deputy Executive Editor.

He writes a regular column in *The Star* called Sunday Starters, previously Monday Starters.

He has also worked in *The National Echo*, *The Malay Mail*, ISIS Malaysia, WWF Malaysia and *The Edge*. He considers his years at home as full-time househusband to be the most wonderful milestones in his career.

Angeline worked as a journalist in *Malaysian Business* and *The Edge* before joining *The Star*. She left *The Star* in 2001 to be a full-time homemaker and serves on a voluntary basis at Emmanuel Care Centre, a school for children with learning disabilities, run by their church.

The Soos have two sons, Kevin and Timothy. They can be contacted via email at:

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Our Heartfelt Thanks

A journey of this nature cannot be undertaken without much support and love.

Over our three journeys, the people who faithfully walked with us have swelled in numbers and are too numerous to list here. We would like to express our gratitude to all of you who have taken a moment (or many moments) to say a prayer, lend a shoulder, share a treat, lighten our load and show your love for us in countless ways. You know who you are. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

*Above all, we want to express our thanks to our perfectly faithful God whose love surpasses knowledge and who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine
(Ephesians 3:19-20).*

About the cover

The first four editions did not have any pictures on the cover while the fifth edition showed only the back view of Ewe Jin, in all his bald glory.

For this latest edition, we decided to “reveal” Ewe Jin upfront. This picture was taken soon after he went bald, in the initial stages of chemotherapy, and is a fair reflection of the happy, positive personality that he is, even when going through trials and tribulations. The joy of the Lord, says Ewe Jin, is my strength!

Our thanks to Sharon Khoh for her creative piece of work. And also to Kalai for designing the picture pages and making the final adjustments on this version.

*From our
journals:
The third battle*

It began in March 2011

One year on...

Today is Sunday, September 9, 2012. Early this morning, I led the 8.30 service in my church, the Emmanuel Methodist Church. It seems like a divine appointment for me. For today marks exactly a year since I completed my treatment for cancer.

The 8.30 service, by tradition, has a smaller congregation, but I felt the immense love of the people gathered.

I pointed out the flowers in the church, which have been offered in thanksgiving by my wife and I. I flashed an image on the screen of me “finishing the race” last Sept 9, and then gave the people a glimpse of the cover of this book you are reading.

It has been only a year, but it seems like so much has passed through my life in this time.

I remember March 20 2011 down to its last detail. On that Sunday, as I prepared to start my treatment the next day, I bravely preached from the pulpit on the message of Hope. This was a pre-assigned speaking engagement and I had asked my oncologist, after the diagnosis in early March, if I could delay my treatment slightly so I could speak in church.

That day, few church members knew about my condition, but it felt like the whole world knew after I finished speaking both at 8.30 and then at the 10.30 service.

I was emotional at times but managed to share the message of Hope as best as I could. The church prayed for me, and two other members going through similar journeys. Everyone came forward. There were plenty of hugs and I have never seen so many grown men cry.

But those were not tears of despair. Rather they were tears of hope and expectations. Although I am known for my generally positive attitude, I knew that it was not my strength that mattered.

God will take care of me, and He will send His earthly angels to help, like He did in my two previous journeys.

I had shared my journey on Facebook and my blog, and even through my regular column in *The Star*, which helped me to track back my journey as I prepared this book.

The next two articles in this book give a fairly comprehensive picture of what we went through but I thought I would use this first piece to reflect on the uniqueness of this third journey.

In terms of treatment, this was probably the most difficult because not only did I have to go through chemotherapy, but this was then followed by radiotherapy. My body took a beating, certainly.

In terms of support, I am simply amazed at how so many people responded. Those who were physically nearby prepared meals while those who were further away regularly sent their wishes –



with gifts and flowers – to remind me that I was not alone.

And because of the Internet, I was upheld in prayer from all parts of the world. My dear friend in Vermont, Mark Tarnacki, did a most wonderful thing by sending jigsaw puzzles halfway round the world to keep me occupied at home.

And because I also wrote a regular column in *The Star* called Monday Starters (now called Sunday Starters because it shifted), when I hinted about the journey without going into details, I started getting email from readers who wished me well, and prayed along with me.

On the day I started treatment on March 21, my column included this portion:

“I am about to embark on a journey which I have been through before. Right now, I do not see clear signs and directions, but I know I can always take that first step in faith.

In life, when faced with an unexpected detour, we often ask: “Why me?” Sometimes, it might be good to ask: “Why not me?”

For, although, we know not what the future holds, those of us with prior experience, who have been scarred from previous battles, can rest assured that we are now a bit more equipped for whatever life throws at us.

We cannot be arrogant about our abil-

ity, but if we walk humbly and know that God is in charge, the journey might not be too unpleasant after all.

Those of you who have followed this column may understand that I have tried to give a healthy dose of positive vibes to help you start the week, to inject a bit of heart into the corporate soul, to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, and to give you a chuckle now and then.

Hopefully, I will continue to do so in the weeks to come, even as I take a leave of absence from the workplace to deal with this personal journey.”

Although I was away from work, I faithfully continued my column. The writing was therapeutic, and I hardly wrote about the journey itself but continued to reflect on all aspects of life that is the hallmark of my column.

This journey was also different because my eldest son, Kevin, was away in London pursuing his masters at the University College London on a Commonwealth scholarship.

Thanks to Skype, we were able to keep in touch, and he could keep track of my progress.

My beloved family members in Penang also did their part by making short trips and to pander to my demands for special food with their special touch.

Everytime I was in the hospital, there were always visitors. So I had my camera ready to keep



a pictorial record. And because the hospital now had WiFi, I was also able to give a blow-by-blow account in real time.

Such is the wonder of modern-day technology.

On June 7, my wife and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary, but it had to be a low-key one because I was right smack in the middle of treatment.

I must also say that I had the most number of co-sojourners with me this time. It was an opportunity for us to encourage one another although I was very much saddened when some passed away.

Like in the first two journeys, I do not know why I have to go through this. But I know that these trials and tribulations are for a purpose, His purpose, and I can only obediently move along.

The subtitle of this book reads “Three Journeys, God Always Present”. Indeed, He was, and He is. God is very real to me and my family and we cling on to His promise that He will never leave us, nor forsake us. In Him, we will always have the peace that passes all understanding.

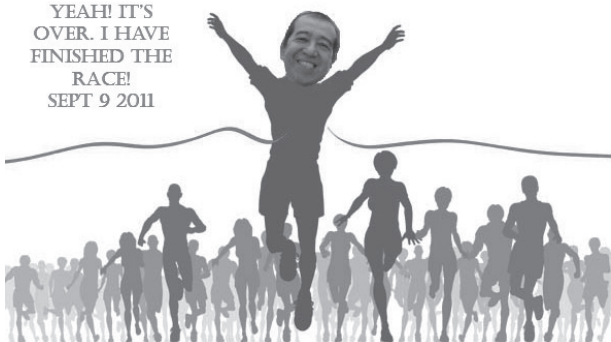
Today is Sept 9 2012 and my Sunday Starters appears in *The Sunday Star*. It has this end note, “Deputy executive editor Soo Ewe Jin celebrates today, Sept 9, as it marks a full year since his medical treatment was completed. He wonders if a cure for cancer will be found in his lifetime.”

We can all hope. And we must all hope. This

book is just our little contribution to encourage all who go through this journey, either as patients, as caregivers, or as family and friends.

I thank you for holding it in your hand. Read, cry if you must (as many tell us they did so after reading our stories), and pass it on. We publish this book for it to be a blessing to others, but we know that we are much blessed in the process.

YEAH! IT'S
OVER. I HAVE
FINISHED THE
RACE!
SEPT 9 2011



As part of my sharing on Facebook, and through email, I would design cards to mark special milestones in the journey. This one was sent out on Sept 9 2011 after my final round of radiotherapy.



Flowers offered in thanksgiving to God at our church on Sept 9 2012 to celebrate one year after treatment was completed.

A third journey – A caregiver’s perspective

By Angeline Lim

On March 7, 2011, we received Ewe Jin’s biopsy result for a lump in the nose, detected during a routine ENT check – malignant! We braced ourselves for another long haul, Ewe Jin’s third cancer journey. The first was in 1999 for a lump in the same spot in the nose, the second in 2006 for a lump in lymph nodes in the neck.

On March 8, scans revealed a more complicated diagnosis. Besides the nose lump, there was also a mass of “uncertain nature” in his submandibular region, deep in the jaw. The oncologist Dr Lum Wan Heng arranged for Ewe Jin to consult with Dr Roslan Abdul Rahman, a very gentle dental specialist and oral surgeon.

After considering the case, Dr Roslan advised for treatment for the nose to proceed first. The lump buried deep in the jaw was hard to reach, and it was impossible to determine its nature without a risky surgery to access the tissue for biopsy. Dr Awal Hassan, the ENT doctor who has journeyed with us since 1999, concurred.

So, still with questions playing in our heads on whether that mass was cancerous or not, we proceeded to discussed options with Dr Lum for treating the nose lump first. He recommended six

sessions of chemotherapy with Docetaxel and Eloxantin, and with the inclusion of a rather amazing new targeted drug for head and neck tumours, Erbitux.

The date was fixed for the first chemo, March 21. Meanwhile, our prayer alert went out to family and friends to pray for God to take charge, for treatment to go smoothly and especially for the lump of “uncertain nature” to be dealt with somehow. The assurance came to me from scripture: “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you” (Isaiah 26:3). God’s peace washed over me. We were assured that He was in absolute control.

To me, the fifth cycle was the most significant in this third journey. After more than two months of chemotherapy, Ewe Jin’s stamina was flagging at that point. Just at the time that we needed encouragement, the doctor ordered a CT scan on June 8. The results showed that the tumour in the nose had shrunk by 70 per cent. Besides that, it showed that the lump in the jaw has not changed in size despite four rounds of chemo. The doctor was thus able to conclude that the mass in the jaw is not malignant, since it did not respond to the chemo drugs. It was confirmed that the cancer was confined to the nose and – for a third time – there was no spread at all!

Scripture says, “LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in **perfect faithfulness** you have done wonderful things,



things planned long ago” (Isaiah 25:1). Perfection is hard to imagine. We are more accustomed to an imperfect world, where broken promises and shattered dreams are common place. But on that day, I caught a glimpse of God’s perfect faithfulness. And it became clear to me that perfect peace comes only from a perfectly faithful God. We simply need to trust Him.

Below is a log of email updates on the chemotherapy that were sent out to family and friends who journeyed with us.

Cycle 1 – March 21

Ewe Jin and I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all who are on their knees praying for us during this journey, as well as all the “Meals on Wheels” ladies who so willingly volunteered to provide us with delicious meals weekly.

We would like to let everyone know that the first chemo session on Monday went well, and this is surely in answer to all your prayers. The chemo drip took a long time – we were there for 8 hours from 9am to past 5pm, because 3 different drugs were administered – but everything went smoothly. There were no side effects. When we got home, Ewe Jin had a hearty meal (from sister Violet’s kitchen) and after that he rested well. In the following days, Ewe Jin has been his usual cheerful self, has a good appetite, and only occasionally needs to lie down to rest.

We have been told that rashes and acne may

appear in the next two weeks, and his hair will drop in about that time also. We are prepared for these side effects, and we are also monitoring for fever as his lowered immunity requires us to be more watchful. How gracious our Heavenly Father is! He sustains us and surrounds us with His tender care. His grace is sufficient for every need of ours. We are deeply comforted by your prayers. Thank you for journeying with us.

Cycle 2 – April 11

Thank you to all who continue to pray for Ewe Jin and others who are unwell. This second round of chemo has been more challenging. Ewe Jin is more fatigued. Besides that, ulcers have broken out in his mouth and on the tongue, which has made it harder for him to eat. Thankfully, there are no ulcers in the throat so swallowing is not painful. Prayer points for him would be:

- ▶▶ for the side effects to subside, and especially for the ulcers to clear up.
- ▶▶ for refreshment and rest in the Lord, and for restoration of energy.
- ▶▶ for peace in his spirit.
- ▶▶ for him to be prepared in body and spirit for the next chemo on May 3.

For myself, this cycle was full of sadness as on April 13, my eldest sister Lucy went home to the Lord after a three-year battle with cancer. Her wake and funeral services were truly heart-warming. Lucy and her husband Pastor Alvin Tan had



co-founded Sunbeams Home, and for her home-going services, more than a hundred Sunbeams children were present to pay their tribute. I was greatly comforted that she had made a difference in so many lives, and that she will receive her reward from God.

Cycle 3 – May 3

This third round of chemo, Ewe Jin is still in good spirits, but feeling more fatigued. The “heaty” drugs are again causing ulcers in the mouth, although it is less extensive than in the last cycle. The current spell of extremely hot weather has not helped, and Ewe Jin’s body has broken out in patches of red rashes which are itchy and uncomfortable. Still, having completed 3 cycles, he has now passed the half-way mark and that is a psychological milestone!

We have been receiving gifts of fruits, fish, cooling drinks, eggs, soups, desserts, many delicious meals and lots more – we are overwhelmed by the outpouring of love from our wonderful family and friends, and are deeply grateful. Below are some prayer points for Ewe Jin:

- ▶▶ for minimal side effects from the chemo drugs, and relief from ulcers and rashes.
- ▶▶ for the drugs to be effective in shrinking the tumours, and for protection of healthy cells.
- ▶▶ for comfort and deep rest in the Lord.
- ▶▶ for cheerfulness to be sustained.
- ▶▶ for the 4th chemo on May 23 to go smoothly.

Cycle 4 – May 23

Cycle 4 went smoothly, due in large part to the fact that the doctor reduced the drugs from 3 to 2 after looking at a nasty “crater” on Ewe Jin’s tongue, the remains of an ulcer that stubbornly refused to heal.

So it was only Erbitux and Eloxantin this time; Docetaxel was omitted, and the chemo drip was shortened. By 4pm we were happily packing up to go home. The easier regimen meant that Ewe Jin was more energetic and upbeat this round, and had an excellent appetite.

It gave us the chance to celebrate our Silver Wedding Anniversary on June 7, on a smaller scale than planned, but it was nonetheless a meaningful and joyous celebration with family.

Cycle 5 – June 13

On June 8, Ewe Jin had undergone a scan to assess the progress of treatment. When we arrived for cycle five of chemo on June 13, Dr Lum told us the results were excellent – a marvellous experience for us of God’s faithfulness!

The scans showed that the tumour in the nose had shrunk by 70% – a very good interim result. Besides that, the lump in the jaw did not shrink, meaning that it is not malignant! The mass will have to be investigated by an ENT or oral surgeon later on. After the 6th cycle of chemo, the onco intends to do an MRI scan to plan for radiotherapy. The full treatment is 70 grays of radia-



tion – usually given in 35 sessions (7 weeks) of radiation. The option of augmenting the RT with brachytherapy may be considered.

The day before Cycle 5, a good friend, VK, passed away. Ewe Jin was very much saddened. He wrote the obituary for the newspapers and we went to pay our last respects. The chemo the next day went smoothly, once again only Erbitux and Eloxantin was administered and Docetaxel was omitted. However, Ewe Jin was much more fatigued this time, probably because of the activity on the day before, and was in bed by 9pm. Thankfully he still had a good appetite and ate a full meal that evening.

Cycle 6 – July 4

Ewe Jin's 6th and last chemo on July 4 went smoothly. We were at the hospital for a full day, though, because on the same day, he did a CT scan and an MRI, which are necessary to plan for his radiotherapy. RT will probably begin in the last week of July and last 7 weeks.

It will be done daily for 5 days in a stretch, with 2 days' rest on weekends. The oncologist has not briefed us yet on how many sessions there will be altogether, but it is likely to take us to the beginning of September. Here are some prayer points:

- ▶▶ First, a thanksgiving that God answered our prayers! From the 4th chemo onwards, Ewe Jin has had NO side effects apart from fatigue!

- ▶▶ for the upcoming RT, pray that the doctor will do the planning well and that there will be minimal collateral damage to tissue in the head and neck area.
- ▶▶ specifically, pray that:
 - ▶▶ the optic nerve will be preserved, so there will be no damage to his eyesight.
 - ▶▶ his throat will not be sore, and he will be able to eat and drink throughout RT treatment.
 - ▶▶ most of the salivary glands and taste buds will be spared, and Ewe Jin will not lose his sense of taste.

We were rather weary in body and spirit last week. Chemo was quite a marathon, and you know how it is sometimes when you don't feel the tiredness till the run is over. But the Lord is good and we are refreshed. With the marathon over, Ewe Jin is preparing for a "middle distance sprint" – radiotherapy.

RT begins – July 26

On July 26, the first day of RT, Dr Lum explained that he would augment the radiotherapy with a weekly dose of Cisplatin via chemotherapy, to sensitise the tumour and render the RT more effective. It was tough going for Ewe Jin, especially on the days the chemo was administered. But he soldiered on.

It helped immensely that radiotherapy technology had improved by leaps and bounds since he last underwent it in 1999. Back then the ma-



chines were 2-D, meaning that the rays were directed only in two planes, vertically and horizontally, hence there was considerable collateral damage to surrounding tissue.

This time round, the machines are 3-D, and the technicians showed us how the rays would be broken up into more than 10 different doses as the machine swung 360 degrees around Ewe Jin's head. This way, the rays were sharply focused on target tissue and much of the surrounding areas were spared.

There was no way, however, that they could avoid zapping Ewe Jin's throat. Once more he had to deal with difficulty swallowing solids and was on a fully liquid diet. He shed all the weight he gained during chemotherapy, and then some. Still, compared with 11 years ago, he had much more energy and was upbeat to the last session.

The highlight of our daily trips to the RT Suite (except for weekends) was the interactions we had with many fellow patients as well as the wonderful, cheerful staff there. The comradeship and exchange of stories and anecdotes kept us all going.

This was Ewe Jin's email to a dear friend midway through RT:

“The side effects include ulcers, raw wounds in the mouth area that basically impede eating, drinking and talking (the three loves of my life!). So I have been rather quiet (vocally) and lost a fair amount of weight as I am unable to take solid

food. I take nutritional drinks like Ensure to keep the body going and generally also a lot of liquids to prevent dehydration.

The most frustrating is, of course, the loss of taste, when even the best branded ice cream tastes like cardboard. Like in 1999, I pray that this will be a temporary loss. The daily blasting of the same region with the RT rays has also resulted in many torn capillaries so I bleed from the nose and phlegm in the throat is often tinged with blood.

It all sounds pretty tough but when I look at it in comparison with what I went through that many years ago, I must say that the treatment is easier on my body and the side effects are also minimised. Back in 1999, I was so worn out at one stage, I had to be hospitalised and put on the drip. I guess life is about perspective and how we choose to view things. I am so surrounded by love and the battle is already won.”

All done, all clear

Sept 9, 2011 was a day of celebration as Ewe Jin completed his final RT session; he did 33 rounds in all. Throughout this third journey, we were assured of God’s presence with us – “for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your *rear guard*” (Isaiah 52:12).

Ewe Jin did lose some sense of taste, and eating was a challenge immediately after treatment. But his tastebuds are gradually being restored and



it is a delight to see him savour his food now. On April 23, 2012, Ewe Jin underwent a complete PET-CT scan and the results were excellent – all clear! What an amazing God who heals!



Angeline loves to paint and this special thank you work of art is now prominently displayed at the hospital oncology ward.



The famous RT mask that is a talking point among friends.

Three journeys with cancer

By Soo Ewe Jin

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” (1 Peter 5:10)

I received this comforting verse from my dear friend, Peter Young, soon after I sent out the news on March 7, 2011 that the biopsy result from a routine examination of my nose area had turned out positive. The tumour was at the very same spot when my first journey with cancer began back in April 1999.

There were other tests to be carried out before the doctors decided that I should undergo chemotherapy first, six rounds over three-weekly cycles. My oncologist did not sound alarm bells that I had to be treated immediately so I requested that it only begin on March 21. I had my reasons.

I was to speak in church on March 20 and I didn't want to give it up. I had started preparing for the sermon and as I worked on it, I knew God was speaking to me. I had a mission to share to the congregation, and in the process, God would remind me of His abiding presence.

On that Sunday, some members of the church already knew that I had cancer, but many did not. I planned to share the news towards the end, but Pastor Andrew pre-empted that by asking the



church to pray for me before I spoke.

It was truly a heart-warming experience and I could not hold back my tears. The church members came forward and many laid hands on me, and also Sister Ruby, who was going through a similar journey at the time.

It seemed so heart-wrenching that three members of EMC were being put through this trial at the same time (the other person being Gay).

When I finally spoke, I composed myself and shared a message which I had entitled "Hope". Dear friends from other churches were present, as were two of my sisters and their families.

At the 10.30 service again, the congregation prayed for me. It was indeed a day when God not only told me how real He is, but that through his "angels" here on earth, He would guide me by my hand, moment by moment. Many cried and hugged me; it was truly emotional.

And so chemo began the following day. In the six cycles that I went through, the support was tremendous. Some visited me at the hospital, some at home. The "Meals on Wheels" team sprang into action under Dr Violet How's supervision, and they cooked up wonderful meals for me and my family. My neighbours of all races and religions also responded, like they did during my first and second journeys.

I thank God that once again, like in 2006, my company agreed to pay the bills.

By the third round of chemo, a CT scan showed

that the tumour had all but disappeared. But the journey had to go on. After my chemo finished, the doctor said I would have to go through 35 rounds of radiotherapy. My heart sank.

In my first journey, I underwent 35 rounds of RT too and the side effects were quite tough. I didn't relish the thought of having to go through that again, especially when I lost my sense of taste for quite a while. For my second journey, I had undergone an operation to remove a lump in my neck and the subsequent adjuvant chemotherapy was not as bad as anticipated.

But now, I had to go through a double-whammy. After consulting other doctors, and with much prayer, I went ahead with RT.

I persevered and with improved equipment, the RT was not as bad as the one in 1999. While medical progress helps, I know ultimately it is God who heals.

On June 7, right in the middle of my treatment, my wife and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. Throughout my treatment, my elder son Kevin was studying in London and we kept in touch via Skype. But I was really happy when he completed his studies and came home, soon after my treatment finished in September.

Although I had taken a six-month leave of absence from work, I continued to write my regular column in *The Star*. I also chronicled my journey in cyberspace. Through my blog and FaceBook, I was able to give a blow-by-blow ac-



count of my journey and many friends from all over the world joined me in my journey. Their words of encouragement, from thousands of miles away, added a new dimension to what I went through.

On March 20, 2012, I posted on my FaceBook, “Today, March 21, marks exactly one year after I started the first round of chemo. Five more rounds followed, and then 35 rounds of radiotherapy. It was quite a journey. The T-shirt I wear is the same one I wore back in 2006. Psalm 23 reminds me of God’s care and abiding presence. The lovely lilies are from Maria Rode who sent them through my wife last night to ‘celebrate God’s goodness, faithfulness and love towards me’. Thank you God. Thank you to my FB family.”

I thanked everyone who journeyed with me, including my EMC family. There were moments of sadness and sorrow for me, when fellow patients went home to the Lord. Yet there is always the assurance that they are safely home in His arms, where there is no more pain and every tear is wiped away.

What is God’s purpose for bringing me through three cancer journeys and healing me completely each time? I am continuing to seek His plans for me.

For now, I know that God put me back into the oncology ward for a reason, as there were so many patients to relate to, to share with and to pray for. I also hope to embark on another writ-

ing mission soon to update my little book, “Face to Face with Cancer” where I can chronicle in greater detail, this third journey with cancer.

The message remains the same: God is Sovereign and He is fully in charge. And through all our trials and tribulations, only God makes the difference. To God be the Glory!

This was written for the book, God is Good, published by Emmanuel Methodist Church in conjunction with its 15th anniversary in March, 2012.



A jolly good time with jigsaw puzzles: Special thanks to my dear friend, Mark Tarnacki of Vermont, whom I met during my attachment to the Brattleboro Reformer back in 1986 on an American press fellowship. Mark sent puzzles by mail to keep me occupied during my time of treatment and recuperation.



It would not be possible to include all the postings made on Ewe Jin's Facebook during the journey, but this posting is special and we decided to include it in the book.

Amidst the dark clouds, a very special silver lining...

On June 7, today, my wife and I celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary. It is the Silver Anniversary and it reminds me of that most common saying that behind every dark cloud there is a silver lining.

I wonder how many of you have actually seen such a silver lining. I have seen it many times because looking upwards is something I do quite often – be it to appreciate a sunrise, a sunset, the clouds or simply the clear blue sky.

I realize that it is hard for those who know me to equate my current battle with the Big C as a dark cloud. After all, those who have visited me have remarked often enough that I look perfectly okay. Save for the bald look, no one would know what I am going through.

Through my generally positive writing in public, people do wonder if I have my dark moments. It seems you are always swimming upstream, a friend commented.

I wonder how many of you have read our book, *Face to Face with Cancer*, with the blow-by-blow account of my earlier two journeys.

I note one thing – those who are cancer pa-

tients, or the immediate caregivers, are the ones who have read it cover to cover. I suspect that the majority of those who have a copy of the book, but where the Big C is not real to them, have just given it a quick browse.

Which is a shame. The chronicles will reveal that it is not always positive. Like a rollercoaster, as my wife puts it, my emotions can run wild at times. The book is not so much a journey with cancer, but a journey with my Soulmate.

It is the same with this journey. Just the other day, I was really down and was in effect telling my wife that I have lost faith in people. I felt all alone as the visitors have dried up, as have the letters, the cards, the SMSes. No one seems to want to hug me anymore.

Being home-bound out of medical necessity, I could not be proactive in seeking out company, as I was able to when I was fully well. Dear friends were in hospitals, and I could not visit them. Nor could I drop in on old, lonely people to have tea or a chat. I could not run around doing errands. It seemed the world has moved on.

But of course, the reality is not as bleak as I have described. Funny how chemo drugs can play havoc on your mind as well. The sense of loneliness is exaggerated. Which is why my wife will just smile when I am in this mode and say, "Don't worry, you never lose faith. You never lose heart."

And then, true enough, I will spring back the next day.



My wife is like that. She is indeed the silver lining in my life, and I know God will not feel slighted because He is in a different plane altogether.

But surely, on this side of Heaven, who can compare to my dear wife? In the 25 years we have been married, she has walked alongside me every step of the way. Through good times, through tough times, she has been the steady anchor in my life.

It has been an interesting life for us certainly. I have done well in my career but I still count the years when I stayed home as a full-time homemaker to take care of my two boys to be the most meaningful. It takes a special wife to be able to stand up and tell the world that the man of the house is indeed the man in the house.

And what about my journeys with cancer? Not once, not twice, but three times? Through it all, she is that special caregiver par excellence. I get a lot of support from many friends, relatives and neighbours but only she can be there for me when I need a shoulder to cry on, or when I wake up in the middle of the night, anxious and frightened, wondering what tomorrow holds.

I had made some plans to celebrate this 25th anniversary with something big, but my current health situation does not permit me to do so. And then it dawns on me that for us, every day has been a celebration. We don't need to mark out a day to officially celebrate.

I wake up each morning in the arms of someone who truly takes our marriage vows seriously. And she does not have to join the Obedient Wives Club to prove it. She is not only a great wife, but my friend and my soulmate.

After 25 years, we still talk to each other like the time when we were courting. And as a mother to our two boys, I find no one to compare her with.

Whenever she is asked her why she chose me over the many other admirers, she would say, "I knew your heart!"

And so did I. Our two hearts came together as one because they were in synch with each other. As much as she loves me, her heart is much much bigger than that. Her love extends into areas that seek to bless others.

She has always been that essential reminder for us to be in the world, and yet not of the world. Material prosperity has always been there for our picking but we are thankful that God has blessed us with what we need, no more, no less.

I met my wife on May 2 1985 and we got married 401 days later. It was a whirlwind courtship certainly which hardly gave us time to really know each other deeply before we committed ourselves to spend the rest of our lives together.

These past 25 years have been a journey of discovery and every moment, every decision, have made it such a joy ride.

For many of us, we may notice a silver lining

once in a while. I am thankful that there is this silver lining in my life all the time.

So whether we celebrate our Silver Anniversary, our Golden Anniversary or our Diamond Anniversary, it is indeed very special that we do not regret a single day that makes up all these years.

And my better half responds...

I have on occasion been referred to as the Proverbs 31 wife by Ewe Jin. The fact is there can be no Proverbs 31 wife without a Psalm 1 man – he is like a tree planted by streams of water, he yields fruit in season and prospers in whatever he does.

I have been so blessed to have spent the last 25 years – half of my life – with this wonderful man, who flourishes like a well-watered plant, always offering the good fruit of loving kindness to everyone around him, and prospering in the eyes of God, with treasures that moth or rust cannot destroy.

I looked right into Ewe Jin's heart from the day we met and I was swept off my feet by what I saw – a heart that was kind and selfless and big enough to accommodate everyone, both friend and foe.

Wine and roses quickly gave way to nappy changes and drippy noses. Teething problems, growing pains, teenage angst – these are enough

to faze anyone. But with Ewe Jin beside me, parenting was every moment a joy. Indeed, it has been my great joy and privilege to be a very ordinary woman married to such an extraordinary man.

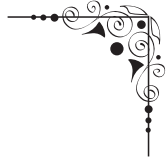
Ewe Jin is a man who thought nothing of downing tools (and mind you, he is very good with those tools) to stay home and be full time father to our boys for many years. He is also always the first to volunteer help to those in need. And above all, has an infectious enthusiasm for life.

In 25 years, there have been as many birthday surprises! I have been so very loved and cherished. And as we continue to journey together, in sickness and in health, I know that the best years are yet to be. Happy anniversary to my Soulmate. I love you!



We both found time to design special gifts to celebrate the occasion. The flowers were sent by Ewe Jin's mother all the way from Penang





WHAT CANCER CANNOT DO



IT cannot cripple love
It cannot shatter hope
It cannot corrode faith
It cannot eat away peace
It cannot destroy confidence
It cannot kill friendship
It cannot shut out memories
It cannot silence courage
It cannot invade the soul
It cannot reduce eternal life
It cannot quench the spirit
It cannot lessen the power of
the resurrection.

– *Author Unknown*



*From our
journals:
The second battle*

It began in November 2006...

A diary of our second journey

As with the first journey in 1999, Ewe Jin and Angeline faithfully chronicle the events and their thoughts in true journalistic fashion.

The lump and the op

Ewe Jin's story

On Monday, Oct 30, 2006, after taking a friend to see my oncologist for a second opinion, Dr Gurcharan Singh checked on a lump on my neck that had been bothering me for the past two weeks.

The week before, my ENT doctor, Dr Awal Hassan, had examined it and concluded that clinically, it was okay, but noted that only a full-fledged scan could give a conclusive result. My oncologist wanted me to do an MRI which I did the following day.

The MRI and ultrasound revealed a firm mass 2cm by 2cm. In the case of an infection, the mass would be more diffused rather than firm, the doctors explained.

My oncologist then said the lump is a 50-50 indication of cancer (because of my prior history) and before proceeding, he would like to discount the possibility. I did a bone scan, a CT scan for the lungs and a CT scan for the liver and kidneys.

It was a long process, reminding me of April 1999. My wife was with me all the time, of course, and we were indeed comforted by all the calls

and SMSes as we waited to do the procedures and see the doctors.

My onco, after analysing all the results, declared that “this is the best possible news” as there were no signs whatsoever of any cancer activity in any part of the body. The lump, however, has to be removed. On Nov 15, Dr Awal undertook the surgery jointly with an expert head/neck surgeon from Tawakal Hospital, Dr Solahuddin Kenali. (*Both Dr Gurcharan and Dr Awal have been taking care of me since my first journey.*)

The plan was to open up the neck, make a quick cut and send a sample to the pathologist for immediate examination. If there was no trace of cancer activity there, the operation would be simple and they would just remove the mass and close me up. If there was any sign of cancer cells, they would probe deeper and remove adjoining nodes and tissue.

The operation was expected to last for about 3 hours. As I had never been in an operation involving GA before, I was rather apprehensive but I knew God was with me all the time and He would see me through.

The anaesthesiologist, Dr Ibtisan Ibrahim, came by in the evening to prepare me for the operation. I told her to please be extra careful and make sure I wake up. She smiled and her demeanour put me very much at ease. She told me to take some tablets before bedtime so I could have a good night's sleep.



Early the next morning, I was wheeled into the operating theatre. I was happy to see Dr Awal, and he told me not to worry. I heard the nurses saying, “He looks like Dr. Tong.” I have heard that remark before. Apparently Dr. Sebastian Tong, the resident general & colorectal surgeon at Damansara, looks like me. I told myself I should say hello to him after I recovered from surgery.

We were ready. Dr Ibtisan looked at me and said she was about to administer the gas. Count to 10, she said. I counted 1.... and I was off to dreamland. The next thing I found myself being awakened. “Mr Soo, can you hear us?” My instant reply was, “Am I still alive?”

Angeline's story

►► **Nov 15 2006:** After getting all the clear scans two weeks ago, I was expecting Ewe Jin's biopsy to be clear, too. But it was not to be. When I was told by the OT nurse during the operation on Wednesday that the lump was malignant, it gave me quite a jolt. I had presumed it would be benign. And so what was to have been a 3 hour operation stretched to 7 hours.

(As an aside, the surgeon called me over mid-way through stitching Ewe Jin up to show me the tissue wrapped in a plastic bag, because the nurse had informed him that “the wife is anxious to see the specimen”. I had said no such thing, of course, having asked only for the biopsy result. Anyway,

the tissue was palm-sized and looked like a piece of liver.)

I didn't have time to pause and think in the busy-ness of the next two days. But on Friday morning, I finally realised the significance of the malignant lump. It actually indicated how close Ewe Jin and I came to a bigger battle.

It meant that there were already cancer cells just waiting to spread, but I believe a Divine Hand contained the cancer and kept it from getting to the bones, lungs, liver and elsewhere. And of course the timing was simply perfect. Our gracious Heavenly Father has spared Ewe Jin and me a much, much harder journey and we are ever grateful.

The surgeon has told us that they will do a biopsy of the tissue that was removed. If the margins of the tissue are clear, then most likely there will be no need for further treatment. But if malignant cells are present in the margins, the oncologist will decide on the next course of action.

We were schedule to see the ENT on Nov 22 to get the full biopsy result. The prayers, encouraging SMSes, gifts in cash and kind, offers to cook, and presence of family and friends, were a comfort to us. Through it all, we had God's peace. We saw up close and first-hand how wonderfully He provides for his children – and we are awed.



The biopsy results

We “broadcast” to family and friends the results from Ewe Jin’s biopsy: 10 out of 25 lymph nodes that were removed had cancer cells, others were clear. All other surrounding tissues (muscle, vein, glands, etc) were clear. The ENT was happy with the surgery and felt that no further treatment was necessary in the area.

What an unmistakable message from God that He is in control of this situation, as in every situation. His protection and providence in the past three weeks assured us that He loves us beyond measure. Above all, God’s presence was with us through it all. His “peace that passes understanding”, which was once a just cliché for us, has become a reality. And we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that our God is Real. And here are other blessings that have simply overwhelmed us:

- ▶▶ the fervent prayers of family and friends have given us much comfort.

- ▶▶ the gifts we received were so generous, we actually had surplus funds.

- ▶▶ some friends and neighbours offered to cook for us, so Angeline drew up a roster and we had wonderful meals from a different kitchen each day of the week, all cooked with love. We had never been so well fed!

Not quite over yet

While we would have liked to end our story at the previous section, a postscript is necessary. When we consulted the oncologist on Nov 29, he asked us to decide on whether Ewe Jin would undergo adjuvant chemotherapy.

This treatment is basically preventive, and is aimed at getting rid of any cancer cells that may be lurking elsewhere in the body. It is an optional treatment, since there is no way to tell for certain whether there is a real need for it.

We were caught off guard when the choice was put before us, as we had thought that our ENT and onco doctors had already arrived at a consensus of no further treatment. It felt as if, having just returned from a mountain trek and about to take a warm shower and put our feet up, we were told to start off again for another mountain.

However, after consultation with many friends (including doctors) and after much prayer, Ewe Jin has elected to go for the chemo.

The whole course comprises six cycles. It would begin on Dec 14, and if all went as scheduled, will finish on March 29, 2007. The cocktail consists of Carboplatin and Taxol. Three GCSF boosters would also be given each cycle. Ewe Jin would probably still have his hair at Christmas, but would lose it all pretty soon after that.

Of course, this development did not take anything away from the way God worked everything



out for us, from the scans to the operation and biopsy, in His perfect timing. We were grateful to have been spared a harder battle.

And as Ewe Jin put it, we knew that whatever mountain we were required to climb, we have our Good Shepherd to climb alongside us. We know He will never abandon us or forsake us.

Ewe Jin was very positive and said that this would complete his cancer experience (since the last time he only underwent radiotherapy) and would make him quite the “comprehensive guide” when he counsels and encourages other patients.

The chemo journey

Angeline's thoughts

I couldn't have asked for more in a patient. Ewe Jin is cheerful, positive, uncomplaining and healing beautifully. One month after his operation to remove malignant lymph nodes, we embarked on yet another journey: chemotherapy.

► **Dec 13 / On the eve of chemo:** Ewe Jin was much chirpier than I was on the 13th. I had been strong as I leaned on God but now standing at this doorway, memories of the first journey came flooding back and I faltered. Thank God for Jin's cheerfulness that saw us through the eve of chemo. Later on, I was assured that this will be a different journey, a different road from before, and there will be much to experience and learn.

*The tears come at last.
I am assured of His presence
yet anxious over the road ahead,
this familiar road
with all its crests and troughs.
I am overcome
by thoughts of overcast days
and an unrelenting bone-weariness.
In my weakness, Lord
is Your strength made perfect.
Your grace is sufficient for me.
I will lean on those Everlasting Arms.*

► **Dec 14 / D-Day:** I am up by 6.30am to pack sandwiches and drinks, but this is no picnic. Ewe Jin will have to snack and drink constantly during chemo. We are at the door of the oncology clinic by 7.15 and already there is a crowd. The nurse arrives at 7.30 and there is a scramble for numbers. We are number 8.

The blood test and then consultation with the doctor takes us up to 10am, after which we traipse up to the pharmacy to ‘order’ the cocktail – Carboplatin and Taxol. It is 11 by the time Jin goes on the drip. The cocktail includes pre-medications that quell nausea magically. Ewe Jin is ‘Most Cheerful Patient’, just as he was 7 years ago. It is a treat to see him, bag of poison emptying into his veins, encouraging the others in the chemo room.

The procedure that should have taken four



hours in fact stretches to six hours in the first cycle, because precautions are taken and the drip is adjusted to a slow speed. It turns out to be an all-day affair and it is past 5pm by the time we finish.

As we walk to the car Jin says he needs to visit the toilet. I wait in the car. After a while I get a call from him, gasping, “Come and help me...” I rush in to find him crumpled weakly on a chair and dripping in sweat. Diarrhoea is one of the side effects. I get an attendant to push him in a wheelchair to the door while I drove the car over, bracing for a long haul.

Jin was exhausted as the chemicals kicked in and slept immediately after a light dinner.

Ewe Jin's thoughts

My wife is still very much a journalist though she has long exited out of the profession. Her chronicles are an accurate reflection of not only what she went through, but what I went through as well.

I guess I have to live up to my reputation as the most cheerful and positive patient at DSH. All these years, I have been making regular visits to the oncology ward to meet friends and total strangers and do my little part to help. For those going through chemo, I found that I could not fully identify with them as I only went through RT. Now, I feel like God's purpose for me is to go through an operation and also chemo so I could

share fully all aspects of known scientific forms of cancer treatment.

But there is a sense of anxiety in me. I am human, after all, not Superman. Well, even Superman is vulnerable to kryptonite...

On the very first day the chemo was administered, it felt like a breeze, until I went to the toilet after the treatment was completed. The diarrhoea, the feeling of life being drained out of me... My first thoughts were, "Hey, is this what chemo really is all about? Have I been misled to believe that it would be easy?"

Questions, and more questions. At that point, I felt like I was about to climb Mt Everest and not just my beloved Penang Hill which used to be a regular hike for me back in my school days. God, not by my strength but by Yours. The reassuring promise from the Word of God puts things back in perspective. But I was tired.

As it turned out, and as the subsequent cycles would show, the diarrhoea was a reaction by my body in the first cycle only. I never had the problem again throughout the rest of my treatment.

Angeline's thoughts

▶▶ **Dec 15-16 / The cycle begins:** The next two days, none of the expected effects materialised – no aches and pains or nausea. Ewe Jin was fine and, thankfully, was eating well. My challenge has been to keep the nutritious, high-protein meals coming – no easy task for an uninspired cook.



But Jin hasn't complained once about the food, bless him. Generally, Ewe Jin has very low energy levels as his body deals with the chemicals that have been pumped in. No doubt it will be a quiet Christmas for the Soos this year.

▶▶ **Dec 17-20 / Easing in:** 'Cycle' used to be a neutral word for me. But with Ewe Jin's treatment being administered in cycles (six of them), the word now connotes many things – ascents and descents, highs and lows... and doing the loop over and over. Imagine a roller coaster with six gut-wrenching rises and drops, and you are seated in the front as the carriage trundles up for the first free-fall. In melancholic moments, that about describes my view from where I am.

But as we ease into the first week of Ewe Jin's chemotherapy, those moments are rare. Most days, I awake thanking God for the many blessings He sends my way – Ewe Jin's great appetite, beautiful skies (no haze), caring friends and family, strength for the day, both physical and spiritual.

We have been told that each patient reacts differently to the chemo drugs. Ewe Jin's body seems to be rolling with the punches and there are hardly any side effects except for the persistent tiredness. The diarrhoea has stopped. No nausea. The numbness in the extremities which we were warned of did not happen at all, and the first week passes by almost serenely. Many nights,

Jin and the boys, who are both on holiday, engage in Scrabble playoffs. How thankful I am for this normality of life.

▶▶ **Dec 21 / Low immunity:** The second week of the three-week cycle is when Ewe Jin's immunity plunges to its lowest. We are cautioned that any infection at this time could be life threatening. Although Jin loves company, I will have to play the bad guy and impose a 'No Visitors' rule for now.

On Thursday, we drive to hospital for a Granocyte booster jab – a marvel of modern medicine that sends his blood count shooting up immediately to help his immune system to cope. I watch to learn how to administer the shot on Ewe Jin's tummy. All I can say is, I'm glad I didn't choose nursing as a career.

We had a hearty banana leaf lunch after that. Ewe Jin is eating even better than before his treatment began. So far, it has been a very different road indeed from our first journey, and a good lesson for me to trust God to show me just the next step instead of peering anxiously into the horizon.

▶▶ **Dec 22-24 / Rashes, visitors and a turkey:** I learnt that you can't quarantine a free spirit. Ewe Jin blithely disregards my 'No Visitors' rule and his friends continue to drop by at a steady clip to see him. The most I can do is screen them for



runny noses and sore throats. A new side effect appeared on Friday: Angry patches of rashes across the body, with clusters especially around the elbows and knees.

On Saturday, we drive to hospital for Ewe Jin's second booster. The oncologist is away on leave, so we check with the nurse about the rashes. She says it is not uncommon among chemo patients and is probably an allergy to the drugs. In the afternoon, two of Ewe Jin's sisters arrive from Penang and cook up a storm in the kitchen – a welcome treat for all of us.

The following day is Christmas Eve. After lunch Ewe Jin's sisters return to Penang and he becomes noticeably moodier. The rashes bother him and he seemed to be breathing more heavily. A pall descends on the atmosphere at home. We all become snappish and sullen.

God knows our every need. That evening He sent angels in the form of the Chans with a special Christmas turkey delivery. Later, the Loos sent over a tub of delicious spaghetti from their Christmas Eve party. Our spirits lifted. We have the sumptuous fare for dinner, plus a bottle of sparkling grape juice from Audrey, Ewe Jin's niece who came to have a meal with us.

Our Heavenly Father has provided for all our needs from the very beginning of this journey, way beyond what we asked for. Our financial needs were taken care of unexpectedly. Friends and family rallied round with support.

The Kuas and the Ohs continue to deliver at least one nutritious dinner each week – they call it ‘meals on wheels’. The Kanas provide a constant supply of bean curd (high protein) and other goodies. Home brewed chicken essence is sent over regularly by Vivian and Karen. We continue to receive gifts of cheques and cash. And a great cloud of supplication rises to God each day on our behalf.

We feel so blessed, and very much loved.

►► **Dec 25 / A meaningful Christmas:** On Christmas Day, we skip Christmas service because a large crowd is expected and it is too risky for Ewe Jin to go. We also forego our traditional open house for the first time in years. The quietness is a sharp contrast from our other Christmases.

But the tempo picks up from noon. Kevin’s friends come over for lunch of leftover turkey and spaghetti, and a mouth-watering chicken pie from our dear neighbour Mahani. We order pizzas and have a great time. Ewe Jin enjoys Boggle and other games with the young people.

Two other families drop in and stay to chat about Ewe Jin’s new journey. In the evening, we join the extended Lim Clan for a scrumptious Christmas dinner, fellowship, carolling and gift exchange.

Chemotherapy naturally wouldn’t be on anyone’s Christmas wish list. But happily, it didn’t



dampen our spirits this season. Our celebration of God's love may be on a lower key than usual but, surrounded by family and friends, it is no less meaningful.

Ewe Jin's thoughts

I knew Christmas 2006 would be different. I wanted to reach out to my friends and the public at large. I wanted to share with them a heart-and-soul comment. So this was what I wrote in *The Sunday Star* on Christmas Eve:

The season for giving and forgiving

My house will not be so open this Christmas. But I know Makcik Mahani will still send over her special chicken pie. She has advised that, for health reasons, I keep this year's celebration low-key.

Over the years, this wonderful neighbour has taught me a lot of practical lessons, and much about the Malay/Muslim world. As have my other neighbours of different ethnicities and faiths.

We learn not only about the do's and don'ts of open houses, but also the rituals of births, weddings and funerals. The most important lesson of all is how to love your neighbour.

Through such interactions, our homes remain open to one another and not only during special occasions.

Today is the day before Christmas and, despite

the lingering headlines and reports of purported tensions in the country's fragile ethnic relations, I am thankful that my neighbourhood ticks in this special way.

I believe it is a spirit of sharing that keeps us together. We often offer to pick up something from the local grocery store, or pass around a ladder or a power drill, or allow our electricity or water supplies to be tapped during a kenduri.

When sharing comes naturally during good times, it also comes naturally during tough times.

I am currently going through a medical upheaval. And the neighbours have responded. They not only covered me with prayer but were quick with their practical help.

Immediately after my recent operation, various neighbours took turns to cook dinner for us. From full-fledged meals to chicken soup (so good for the soul), juices and snack items, they made sure that I was well taken care of. These muhibbah meals, cooked with much love, never tasted so good.

Tun Hanif wrote in his column Point of View (*Sunday Star*, Dec 3, 2006) that “before we start looking around to see what sort of people they are, look hard at our own selves first because they are, in the main, ourselves.

“Yes, my friends, you and I and our attitudes; you and I and our desires; you and I and what we do; you and I and how we have brought up our young; you and I who have chosen our parlia-



ment and allowed our public servants and the public to be what they are!

“For many of us, what has been our own singular contribution to our national unity other than to exist, to demand and to expect?”

Strong words, surely, but he has hit the nail on the head. Many who complain so much about what is wrong with our country live a life apart from the system that they are complaining about.

When I sent my children to the neighbourhood national schools, we got to know the teachers, the parents and the children. In the PTA, we shared our views and our concerns.

Through our involvement, both the primary and secondary school administrations, though predominantly Malay and Muslim, were always sensitive to the needs of the minorities.

After nearly 50 years as a nation, it is sad that we have to struggle to discuss such issues in the public domain, feeling like we are always treading on sensitive ground.

It is about give and take and perhaps this nation will move forward easier if we all emphasise on the giving rather than the taking.

Yes, we have our rights, but so does everyone else. And if we give generously in love, then all the ethnic and religious divides will pale into insignificance. If we give based on needs, there will always be enough to go round.

And, by the same token, if we had been subjected to unfair treatment or been hurt by insen-

sitive remarks, perhaps the answer is not so much about retaliation but about forgiveness.

This is Christmas after all. A season for giving, and forgiving.

May we all endeavour to give faith to those who have lost faith, hope to those in despair and love to those who feel most unloved.

Angeline's thoughts

▶▶ **Dec 26-28 / Another milestone:** Our dear friend Peter treated us to a fabulous Japanese lunch on Boxing Day. Ewe Jin still had a decent crew cut then. That evening, however, we found that his hair came off in clumps when tugged gently. So on Dec 27, the 13th day after chemo, we crossed another milestone: Ewe Jin went to the barber for a full shave. Bald is beautiful, he says. He is not quite a Yul Brynner – more like Telly Savalas – but definitely pretty cool.

We feel at peace right now despite the hair loss and persistent itch of the rashes. This is the close of the low immunity week, and Ewe Jin's temperature never did hit the critical 38 degree mark that would have set off alarm bells. Some well-meaning people have warned that the following rounds will be 'more toxic'. Well, we don't know what lies ahead but we do know without a doubt that our God is able to see us through every storm.

▶▶ **Dec 29-31 / Goodbye 2006:** Friday saw Ewe

Jin's spirits taking a slide, but he self-administered an extremely effective remedy – "Ikea Therapy". He bought four DIY shelves and spent the evening assembling the units and then rearranging his DVDs and magazines. Under RM200 for a neater living area and a cheerier patient – money well spent indeed.

The next day Nancy came to whip up a feast in our kitchen – fried chicken, stewed meat and chicken and vegetable stroganoff. We enjoyed tucking into a great meal prepared with love and flair.

Sunday is New Year's Eve. Ewe Jin read scripture in church today and was warmly welcomed by friends who had missed him the weeks that he was away. It is also Tim's birthday. Ewe Jin and I wanted to do something special for him because he had been so helpful and uncomplaining this holiday while all the medical attention had been on his father. We organise a modest barbecue attended by a few friends and favourite aunties.

Later that night, Kevin's friends come by to welcome the New Year at our house – with sparkling grape juice, a little wine and a game of bridge. No fireworks or gourmet fare, but once again we have a meaningful time with family and friends.

►► **Jan 1-4 / New year, new beginnings:** Hello 2007. I have prayed for a kinder, gentler year. But even if that is not to be, above all, I have asked

for another year of drawing nearer to God. If I had known a year ago what 2006 held for me, I might have tried to run and hide. But as it turned out, I have learned to lean wholly on God, my Rock and my Shepherd. He has faithfully walked with me step by step, through fire and rain.

We had a peaceful start to the new year. Jan 4 sees the end of Ewe Jin's first cycle and his body seems to have fully recovered from the first salvo. We are now ready, both physically and mentally, for the next round on Jan 8. Having gone through one cycle, this is no longer uncharted waters for us. It was a little choppy at times, but our boat was never in danger of capsizing as God was with us in the vessel. In fact, with help from God and family and friends, we have managed to smile at the storm.

►► **Jan 8 – Feb 1 / Thoughts in the Second Cycle:** I have never seen a cloud that wasn't breathtaking. Whether wispy, majestic, stormy, silver-lined, pink or gold – all have a beauty beyond words. Every time I look at the sky, my heart leaps up and I say a prayer of thanksgiving.

What have clouds to do with chemotherapy? Well, in this second cycle the weather has been exceptionally wet – and after each shower the clouds have been awesome, God's masterpiece on a brilliant canvas. To me, they have been a daily reminder that God is near and He gives me all good things to enjoy.



Besides the glory of the skies, good friends are also such a blessing – three of Ewe Jin’s pals came to relieve me from duty during the second chemo on Jan 8, so I could get Timothy home from school and also get some rest. Ewe Jin has gained 1.9kg since treatment began; another blessing! The second round went smoothly – no diarrhoea this time, but the tiredness persists.

On the fifth day, Ewe Jin’s rashes gave so much discomfort that we had to visit the doctor to get medication for it. The pills cause drowsiness and when Ewe Jin took the Kelisa out to run an errand, he crunched the door against another car. It was a good lesson to mind the warning labels on medicines. One thing that has been hard to handle was the mountains of unsolicited advice, at a time when we would much rather people just lent an ear.

I am more familiar with the pattern now: fatigue in the first week, low immunity in the second, recovery in the third, and then on to the next round. All told, it has been a peaceful second cycle – not half as intense as the radiotherapy regimen years ago – and we are generally upbeat.

Still, we’re not saints; far from it. Ewe Jin has his gloomy days and sullen moments. And so far I have averaged two tearful occasions per cycle. Those probably coincide with the hormonal spikes in my own perimenopausal cycles but I’m not keeping track; there are too many cycles to deal with as it is.

At this point in the journey, time seems to be almost at a stand still as Ewe Jin and I put everything on hold to concentrate on the treatment. Sometimes it can be excruciating, with things moving in slow-motion like in a John Woo movie. But I think God is telling us to wait upon Him.

I am thankful that God has kept His promises – of strength for the day, rest from the labour, light for the way, grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing kindness, undying love.

► **Feb 2 – 22 / Thoughts in the Third Cycle:** Three down and three to go. Crossing the half-way mark gave us a boost psychologically. But physically, this third bag of poison packed a hard wallop and took the wind out of Ewe Jin's sails. He was much more fatigued both in body and spirit and it was a full week before he bounced back, twice as long as in the earlier cycles.

I am grateful that he has been spared the discomforts of nausea and has gained another 2.3kg, truly a miracle. Still, the successive waves of drugs are taking a toll on his body and we are bracing for a similar effect in the next cycle.

Compared to radiotherapy, where the treatment was administered in quick succession over seven weeks, chemotherapy is quite a marathon. It is simply not possible to run it like a sprint. Indeed, the days are creeping by and just like in long distance races, there are many lonely stretches along the road. The crowd of visitors



who thronged the hospital room have dwindled to a handful who are keeping pace with us for the long haul. How grateful we are for these angels who regularly help with chores, bring meals and lift us up in prayer.

It is a reminder for me that so many of life's critical journeys are marathons, and the important thing is to stay the course and complete the race. What an assurance it is to know that God, who is our most faithful Friend, will see us through to the finish.

Ewe Jin's thoughts

I should make a note of what happened on the first day of Chinese New Year which fell on Feb 18. I went to return the food containers to our friends who had cooked us many meals.

As I approached the gate, their dog, which we had known for years, lunged at me and took a bite right at the tummy.

Maybe it could not recognise me because I was bald, or perhaps I smelt different because of the chemo. It took a while to find a doctor who could give me an anti-rabies jab.

I told anyone who bothered to listen that the dog must have been upset that the Year of the Dog was giving way to the Year of the Boar. And I am born in the Year of the Boar.

Angeline's thoughts

▶▶ Feb 23 – March 15 / Thoughts in the

Fourth Cycle: Someone noted that from my journal entries, it's unclear sometimes whether Ewe Jin is the one who is going through the chemo, or I am. I have taken too many liberties in my writing. Indeed, Ewe Jin is the one strapped into the roller coaster. It is not my ride... yet I can feel some of the terror of it. The caregiver is often caught in a No Man's Land, neither here nor there. I hope Ewe Jin will soon be able to tell you about his experience himself so we can get the 'inside story'. Meanwhile, these writings are my therapy.

The chemotherapy room is a window to a whole new world. Whatever anguish I feel as I watch from the sidelines, I will never fully know the emotions of the patient who waits five hours for a half-litre of poison to drain into his bloodstream, knowing the havoc it will wreak on his body. These brave ones who face the treatment with such fortitude deserve Purple Hearts.

I am so thankful that Ewe Jin is taking the treatment in stride. Physically, he has put on a further 1.4kg and has a growing girth to show for it. Above all, on most days he is his buoyant self emotionally. Despite the attendant fatigue this cycle, he made a determined effort to live life as usual.

On Day 4 he went marketing and cooked lunch. He bounced back fully on Day 7 (as in the previous cycle) and off he went, visiting other cancer patients and catching up with friends. As the song goes, you can't "catch a cloud and pin it



down”. Still, as the date of the next treatment draws near, he is noticeably subdued – and I get a glimpse of the potency of the therapy, the terror of the ride.

We take comfort that this next round on March 16 will be the penultimate one. After that, only one to go! I am aware that as one chapter closes, another will begin. There will have to be a reassessment of our schedules, roles, diets; our focus in life. But we will take it one step at a time.

A friend noted that Ewe Jin and I must have much faith because she saw “so much peace and calm” in us. The fact is that our faith is very small, but we have a very big God indeed. The journey is challenging, sometimes even gruelling, but one thing that I have gained through it all is an enduring peace. It is a peace that defies logic – incongruous in such turbulent times, and so sturdy that it withstands the fury of the storm. It is a peace that assures me that my God is beside me every step of the way.

▶▶ **March 16 – April 6 / Thoughts in the Fifth Cycle:** When patient and caregiver are both indisposed, who cares for whom? We had a chance to find out this cycle. Two days before chemo day, I was knocked out by vertigo. Thankfully, we have strong family support and my sister Adeline stood in for me on March 16, Ewe Jin’s fifth dose. She was outside our house by 6.45am, ready to chauffeur him to the hospital. She saw

to his lunch, and brought him back home by 3pm. Thank God for cheerful helpers!

It appears the impact of the drugs goes up a notch every two rounds or so, not because the dose is any stronger but probably due to the cumulative effect on a battered body. The force this cycle certainly seemed much greater than before, even if it lasted only one week. I could see an immense weariness in Ewe Jin – not just in body but also in spirit. “Nothing is right,” he said to me in a subdued tone. I was reminded afresh of how potent the drugs are, and wondered about the long-term effects on the body, particularly the liver.

But time does heal and in a week he “sprang back to life”. As we visited and helped other cancer patients, Ewe Jin noted that he has been spared so much suffering compared to others. He is sure that God had a purpose for leading him on a journey that is “just so” – giving him the cancer experience and yet shielding him from intense pain.

The final dose will be on Good Friday, an appropriate day to end the journey. For Ewe Jin, it symbolises the “death of cancer cells” and new life beyond that. We approach the last chemo with mixed feelings. We plan to celebrate, of course, but will also need to buckle down to planning realistically for “life after chemo”.

Transitions are always a challenge, and we hope to navigate this part of the journey smoothly



too. Sometime in this cycle, we attended a memorial service for a man who had devoted his life to God. The victorious note of the hymns and eulogies reaffirmed for us that this journey on earth is but a preparation for life in heaven, and we resolved to take steps now to make that final transition well. As we rejoice in suffering, we are so thankful that the source of our joy and strength comes from an unchanging, ever-loving God.

► **April 6 / My Thoughts as the Journey Ends:** It was a modest affair – muffins, nuts and raisins all round at the clinic, and souvenir shots with a home-made “Last Chemo” mini banner. April 6 was not quite the end of the journey, but it was the last time Ewe Jin would have to go on the Taxol drip, and we celebrated the occasion with the other patients and the wonderfully cheerful oncology nurses.

The very next day, I was floored. The vertigo that hit me in Cycle 5, unappeased by insufficient rest, returned with a vengeance. This time I had no choice but to sleep it off for five days. Poor Ewe Jin had to turn caregiver in that period, despite feeling the full force of the chemo himself. It was an opportunity to fulfil our vows to be helpmates “in sickness and in health”.

At this time, we were also deeply saddened by the death of my sister-in-law Magdalene, who had been through a cancer journey herself. Despite

our sorrow, there was such a triumphant tone at her wake and funeral services. The glowing eulogies made it plain that she had touched many lives in serving God faithfully.

Once more, we were reminded that it is the final transition in life that matters. What an assurance to know with absolute certainty that through faith in Jesus, I will be in God's presence once I go past death's doorway.

There are still loose ends to tie up and crucial post-chemo decisions to be made – on our lifestyle, diet, careers. Ewe Jin will return to work next month, and go for more scans in three months. So while our chemo journey winds down to a close, the journey of life continues. As I take stock of the past six months, here are some thoughts that have crystallised.

Unfounded fears. At the start of this journey, two things brought me to tears. One, I dreaded a rerun of the emotional roller-coaster that we had been on during Ewe Jin's radiotherapy years ago. And two, I was daunted by the thought of feeding Ewe Jin through months of nausea. As it turned out, both these fears were totally unfounded. Ewe Jin was the most cheerful of patients. The mood swings did not materialise. Neither did the nausea – he had such a hearty appetite that he put on more than 10 pounds in six cycles. For the record, there were also no other side effects (numbness, mouth ulcers, etc) besides fatigue and baldness.



A faithful God. Throughout this journey, we have received blessing upon blessing. God's faithfulness simply overwhelmed us. Every financial need was taken care of. Right through to the end of the journey, we received occasional gifts, often at just the times payments had to be made. We were also blessed with strong support from family and friends. There were always hands to help with chores, prepare meals and run errands. Right up to the finish, Ewe Jin continued to receive freshly boiled chicken essence at least twice a week. And the 'meals on wheels' that were delivered regularly to our doorstep are, to me, the greatest idea ever.

Lessons learnt. As I look back, I realise that the journeys through the storms were the times that I truly learnt and grew. Seven years back during Ewe Jin's radiotherapy treatment, I discovered hidden strength I could not have possessed apart from God. God's strength was made perfect in my weakness. This time round, it was God's peace – so inexplicable and unshakable – that kept me steady and secure. As I clung on to God through turbulent times, He has drawn me closer to Him.

So as this 'marathon' ends, I believe that all things have worked for good, just as God has promised. It is my prayer that Ewe Jin and I will continue to wait upon the Lord as He reveals His purposes in our lives after this journey.

Ewe Jin's testimony

And the two shall be one – in sickness and in health; in good times and bad. If you have read up to this point, you will realise how blessed I am to be married to Angeline. I could not have chronicled the journey better.

On June 7, our 20th wedding anniversary, we took a short trip to Port Dickson with our boys before I started work again. I am thankful that *The Star* had kindly granted me medical leave and also taken care of the medical expenses.

When I went back to work, I was still bald but the hair eventually grew back. I was no longer *Sunday Star* editor but was redesignated as Special Projects editor. I took on the new position with an eagerness to face new challenges. Soon my life drifted back to normal and I was reaching out to other cancer patients again, this time with more “credentials”.

In April 2008, one year after my treatment ended, I asked my pastor for permission to thank the church from the pulpit for being so supportive during my journey. Pastor Ting went one step further and asked me to share it as a sermon. I would like to share some portions of it here.

Sharing with my church

My first journey, which most of you are familiar with, only involved radiotherapy, but now I have gone through an operation and chemotherapy. In



the world of cancer, we refer to these three forms of treatment as the Slash, Burn and Poison regimen. When you operate, you slash; when you do radiotherapy, you burn; when you do chemo, you poison. Now I can counsel anyone on all three.

I try to be positive. Yes, God, use me. But God, I am tired. I still have to ask you, “Why? Why Me?” God’s response is that He understands, and that His grace is sufficient for me. The operation and the chemotherapy took six months and I thank God that my company took care of all the hospital bills. In those months, God gave me the peace that passes all understanding and sent so many angels to take care of me.

As a cancer survivor, and as an encourager to many who are going through similar journeys, I can say that only God can make the difference. It is so clear how the peace that passes all understanding prevails in the lives of those who surrender their circumstances to Him. Even at death’s door, the serenity on their faces says it all.

I would also like to share about our human response to situations where a dear family member or friend has to go on a difficult journey of ill health. Is it all right to be angry? Is it all right to cry? Is it all right to think that the God who loves me so much, is nowhere near? Is it all right to shout, “Why me?”

I have always advocated the right of a patient (and loved ones) to be angry, anguished and un-

happy. Our God is a big God and He is patient with our rantings.

In my own journey, nothing hurts more than when I am reprimanded for having so “little faith” in God. Why are we expected to have super-faith at times when we are struggling physically, emotionally and spiritually? I remember when I had been hushed up by people who feared that if I were to question God, it meant my faith was too small.

James Dobson, in his best-selling book *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, said, “Doubting one’s faith and one’s self is a natural part of the Christian life.”

He related how Christians often fail in this respect because they are too eager to remind the patient of what God can do. So there is a lot of “God conversations” during visitations which can make the patient even more miserable.

During my treatment, my wife had to stop visits from people who took a toll on my physical well-being. Think for a moment – are you one of those who insist on hurrying to see a cancer patient, not to offer practical help or a silent prayer, but to convince yourself that God is in control?

I would like to suggest some practical steps that hopefully can benefit us when someone close to us has to go through a cancer journey.

▶▶ If you are not a doctor, and especially if you do not know anything about cancer, please do not give medical advice. Not only do I not

give medical advice, but I also take care not to overly share my own experiences because we know every patient is different, not only by way of temperament but also in the way he or she reacts to the treatment.

▶▶ We should be happy to share our faith with non-believers but I personally do not believe that aggressive evangelism at such a time is useful or appropriate. I have personally experienced cases where some church members were banned from visiting certain people because the patient and the caregivers could not handle the situation. Go as a friend and let God do His work in His own way, and in His own time.

▶▶ I find that I often have to help people debunk the myths. I tell them not to listen to the horror stories of people who were there years ago. A problem that all cancer patients face is that the moment the Big C is mentioned, everyone will have a horror story to share, a supplement to recommend, an alternative cure to promote, and a doctor to criticise. Such unsolicited advice can confuse, depress and disturb. Let us be careful how we give advice.

▶▶ I have learnt, through many trials and errors, that at a time when someone is facing a problem, the last thing he wants to hear is another person's problem. Do take note that when you visit, make the person you visit the most important person for the moment. No need to tell him about this person or that person. I remember how

someone told this patient about me and that person's immediate retort was: "You see, God is so unfair. He heals Ewe Jin but He makes me suffer!"

▶▶ Rather than dispense advice, the best thing you could do for a cancer patient is to simply be there. If we are the person with whom someone wants to share his burden, let's learn to keep our mouth shut and our ears open. Let's just be there to hold their hands.

▶▶ Practical help, often behind the scenes, is the most useful. Help with transport, help with the cooking, take the patient's children out. Share your books, CDs and DVD collections with patients.

▶▶ Finally, remember the caregiver. My wife, the woman from Proverbs 31, is worth far more than rubies. How glad I am when a friend comes by not only to give me fruits but to give her essence of chicken or a bouquet of flowers. Take the caregiver out to a meal or to a movie, or a walk in the park. Remember the caregiver, my friends, not just the patient.



A photo diary of Journey 2



A succesful operation on the neck: My dear friend and ENT doctor, Dr Awal Hassan, who remains as one of my principal doctors



through all my journeys.

Dr Gurcharan Singh was my oncologist in the first two journeys until he migrated to the US.



The chemotherapy journey was made so much more bearable with the ever cheerful nurses at the Damansara Specialist Centre oncology ward, Aminah (left), Azura (right) and Anita (behind). Aminah cared for me in Journey 3 as well.



GOD'S PROMISES





GOD didn't promise
days without pain,
laughter without sorrow
or sun without rain.

But God did promise
strength for the day,
comfort for the tears
and a light for the way.

And for all who believe
in His kingdom above,
He answers their faith
with everlasting love.

*(This is a famous poem but the
author is unknown. I have a plaque
with this poem sitting on my desk
in the office to remind me to remain
faithful with God through good or
bad times)*





WORDS OF
COMFORT





THE Lord is my strength and my shield; in Him my heart trusts; so I am helped.

– *Psalm 28:7*

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly moved.

– *Psalm 62:1-2*

Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

– *Isaiah 41:10*

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

– *John 11:25-26*

For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

– *John 3:16*



*From our
journals:
The first battle*

It began in April 1999...

A diary of the journey

I remember April 19, 1999 like it was yesterday. That was the day I was “zapped” in radiotherapy or RT, the first of 35 sessions spread over seven weeks, daily except for weekends. It has been five years since.

Today, the NPC or nasopharyngeal carcinoma – nose cancer in common terms – is in complete remission.

During my treatment, my weight plunged dramatically. Now my old pants fit snugly around my waist once more. During RT, my taste sensations all but disappeared. Today I can taste everything I eat and even my salivary glands seem to be cooperating.

The past five years have seen me go from highs to lows as my health hung in the balance. Most of all, it has strengthened my faith in God, who healed me. Here is a brief record of my weeks of treatment written during the journey itself. The thoughts of my wife, Angeline, are interspersed between my recollections.

►► **Discovery and pre-treatment stage:** In the middle of November 1998, I experienced nose-bleed and a blocked ear. Ordinarily, I would never have consulted the doctor for such seemingly small problems. But for some reason, I went to see my GP friend, Dr Chang Chee Wah. He referred me to the ENT specialist at Universiti Hospital (now known as the Universiti Malaya

Medical Centre) to have the symptoms checked out, “just to be on the safe side”. A biopsy turned out negative, and gave my family and me a chance to celebrate the “good news” with a Thanksgiving Christmas Party. In March 1999, when the ear pressure problem returned, a second biopsy was recommended together with a CAT scan and I was told to collect the results on April 15.

►► **April 15:** The doctors at UH told me that I had cancer. It came as a shock to me that the cells had evolved from benign to malignant in a matter of four months. The good news was that my cancer was in Stage One and was 100 per cent curable. The people at UH knew what they were talking about. After all, the resident expert on nose cancer is Professor Umapati Prasad, whose lifetime of research into this particular cancer has won him accolades in Malaysia and globally. I thanked God for a GP who doesn’t take chances. Because it would have taken a few weeks for me to get my turn at UH’s radiotherapy clinic, I asked for options and was referred to the Damansara Specialist Hospital under the care of Dr Gurcharan Singh Khera.

►► **April 16:** I went to DSH to prepare for radiotherapy, 35 sessions over a seven-week period. I was fitted with a white plastic mask that looks like a fencing mask, which is screwed on to keep my head in position each time the machine zaps me. My boys remarked that I looked like Darth Vader!



► **April 19:** RT began. The first session was like a carnival. I was accompanied by my wife Angeline, my fifth sister and her husband who happened to be visiting from Penang at the time. The staff were courteous and encouraging and I thanked God for leading us to this place.

I got to know the other patients and their caregivers. One patient travelled each morning from Nilai; another came from Klang. Compared with them, I am practically within walking distance of the hospital. But our sojourn into the radiotherapy chamber is more or less the same: three minutes each at the most.

The first two weeks were a breeze. Staff at the clinic dubbed me the “most cheerful patient”. That was before bacteria and fungi began to party in my throat.

(Angeline’s thoughts at the end of Week Two)

We were generally upbeat because Ewe Jin’s cancer was in Stage One and had an excellent chance of being cured. He was undergoing radiotherapy, and we were grateful to be spared the ravages of chemotherapy.

While we counted these blessings, our hearts went out to other patients whom we had befriended in the oncology clinic – those in Stage Two or Three who had tougher battles and, worst of all, those who were alone in their suffering. We didn’t know what the purpose was for this twist of events in our lives. What we did know was that we had developed an empathy with other cancer patients which one can’t possibly acquire looking in from the outside.

▶▶ **May 1:** The toughest part of the RT was Weeks Three to Five. My throat was attacked by bacteria and fungi that caused a serious infection. I was only able to take Enercal (a high-energy food drink) and juices, and my weight dipped steeply. My entire throat area hurt so much that even taking fluids was torturous. I felt nauseous most of the time.

In the first two weeks, I was guzzling down so much water that they could not refill enough bottles for me. In Week Three, I struggled to finish even one.

▶▶ **May 7:** I coughed up blood and vomitted in the bathroom. I lay on the floor, drained of energy. At the time, my fifth and seventh sisters were in town as well, and I felt really bad that they had to see me in this state. Finally, I decided to get myself admitted to the hospital for a one-night stay, to go on the drip.

Well, just another day in the life of a cancer patient undergoing radiotherapy. The drip did its job and after that my throat improved gradually. But skin on my cheeks and neck began to look like a really bad case of sunburn. People would stare at the angry burn marks.

(Angeline's thoughts at the end of Week Three)

Nausea. A throatful of ulcers. Excruciating pain. It is beginning to be obvious to me that we were in this for the long haul. Ewe Jin was admitted into hospital last Friday to go on the drip. The doctor gave us the option and



Ewe Jin decided to go for it. It was simply too painful for him to even drink. We had a host of questions, all of them bewildering to us, but oh-so-routine to the doctor. Yes, just one day on the drip would be enough to get Ewe Jin back on liquids. No, the sore throat won't go away, until the therapy is all finished. Yes, he should regain his confidence to eat again, and bear with the rest of the treatment.

Any other questions? No, it doesn't really make a difference how the food is taken - an all-liquid diet is okay, as long as it's high calorie, high protein. Any other questions?

Treatment at the hospital was five-star. The nurses were incredibly cheerful and the medicines worked like a charm. I stayed one night with Ewe Jin and helped untether him from the tubes when he needed to go to the toilet.

Saturday he was discharged and Sunday morning he was bright and perky. Then in the evening the pain came back. Ewe Jin's brow furrowed into a frown. And I snapped. Don't swing up and down like a yo-yo, and don't take me along with you, I said unreasonably.

►► **May 9:** Today is Mother's Day. I woke up feeling great, went to church and met with many concerned church members who had been praying for me. I could drink my whole bottle of water. When I came back, I even managed to consume some porridge. The ulcers will not disappear overnight but I think it is now under control. The doctor has given me all sorts of medicine to minimise the discomfort, including local anesthetic administered in jelly form. Through it all, I was sustained by the love and concern of family members and mentally wished

all mothers in the family a Happy Mother's Day.

(Angeline's thoughts at the end of Week Four)

We were now in the middle of the therapy. Stage One completed, said the radiologist with a smile. Well, the middle seemed to be fraught with mood swings, like a rollercoaster ride. There were so many ups and downs in a day, I was feeling exhausted from the ride.

Usually mornings held lots of promise. Ewe Jin would feel like he could lick this thing. He'd go about the house doing his usual chores. Come noon, he'd slow down. By afternoon he would retch. And my heart would sink again.

It was a period of contradictions. I was too distracted with Ewe Jin's medication to bother with small things - housework, personal grooming. Yet at the same time, small things became so very important.

Mother's Day was yesterday. Ewe Jin was too tired to "orchestrate" gifts from the boys. A friend's daughter gave me a rose, another friend's child gave me a bag of potpourri. Somehow, it meant a lot that these friends shared their Mother's Day gifts with me.

Unexpected gifts of cash and kind from friends brought a lump to my throat. I'd get teary-eyed when family members came to help out - fetch the kids, mop the floor, be around. When Ewe Jin smiled or cracked a joke, it was enough to make me cry. I guess emotions are heightened by tiredness and insufficient sleep. When it's all over and I look back on that period, I'd probably feel silly about being so emotional. At that point, all I knew was I had to work extra hard just to stay on an even keel. Maybe Stage Two would have fewer



crests and troughs. I sure hoped so.

►► **May 19:** Today, I completed Dose No 23, with 12 more to go. I can confidently say that I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I talked to a fellow patient, a very nice 50-something Datuk, who told me that “radiotherapy is a breeze compared to chemotherapy” which he had to endure after they removed one of his lungs because of his lung cancer. This man is not even a smoker. Another young chap I spoke to had the same ailment as me, but his was at Stage Two when they found out. I did my best to encourage everyone I met at the clinic. I was indeed blessed to always have a “mini-entourage” with me when I went for treatment. Financially, we had enough to meet whatever expenses so far. Jesus is my Anchor in every Storm. A car passed by me with this sticker on the windscreen. How true indeed!

(Angeline’s thoughts at the end of Week Five)

The countdown had begun. Just 10 more therapy sessions to go! We saw the light at the end of the tunnel and suddenly even bad days were bearable. But it was also at this time that my body decided it had taken enough punishment and gave in to a full-blown bout of flu. Spiritual strength is more important than physical strength, but it would help to have both!

These days, Jin smiled a lot more, and the boys were glad to “have their Pap back”, even if he was “thin like a prairie dog”, as Tim observed. We’ve had to entertain visitors by the dozens. I guess I was glad Jin had that

many concerned friends. Still, it was exhausting. People have tried to be helpful, and some have actually been. In retrospect, what would have helped the most would have been a listening ear, no advice; and yeoman's services – cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, fetching the kids, pairs of hands and feet when I needed them! I thank God there were people around who were sensitive to my needs.

This week, I also received a card addressed to me. Not Jin and me. Such a little gesture, but it meant a lot. Here's to all caregivers to the sick around the world. I think they all deserve medals.

▶▶ **June 4:** Hurray, last day of RT! I celebrate by giving out little teddy bears to the doctor and staff of the Oncology Clinic. The next checkup is in a month's time but it will be at least a year before the all-clear can be given. I have lost 10kg from Week One. Seems like a good slimming programme, radiotherapy!

▶▶ **June 7:** It's our 13th wedding anniversary and also the day when we go to UH to take the results of my liver and bone scans. Everything is clear – the cancer has not spread! I will still have to go for check-ups every six months, and record five years of remission before I am officially pronounced “cured”.



The rainbow

The day before therapy began, we decided to treat ourselves to a seafood dinner before I had to observe dietary restrictions. As we sat rather gloomily in the restaurant that early evening, I looked out and was surprised by the sight of a rainbow, clear and bright, even though there was not a drop of rain. To me, that was a sign of God's promise that He would see me through this journey. I wrote this poem soon after.

A heart so burdened
Unanswered "whys"
Turmoil within
Despair and sighs

Spirits battered
Thoughts running wild
Then a voice beckoned:
Look up, my child

There was my rainbow
Lighting up my way
God's sign to me
On a clear, dry day

Be at peace, my child
Have no fear
You think me distant
But I am ever near

I will send my angels
To soothe your tired soul
Rest in me, my child
You won't walk alone

A promise made
A promise claimed
Thus began my journey
To my rainbow's end

Ahead there was
Both sunshine and rain
Yet, joy released
Despite the pain

There was no pot of gold
At my rainbow's end
But God's promise of life
Round every bend



This poem was put to music and the song was sung for the first time when I gave my testimony in church. It brought tears to my eyes.

Lessons from the caregiver

By Angeline

It was a whole new world, surreal and cold. Sometime in April 1999, Ewe Jin and I stumbled unceremoniously into this new dimension called oncology.

There is no party-pooper like cancer. There seemed to be only losers; it's just a matter of how much you lose. It may be taste buds, hair, organs or loved ones.

Through this storm of physical trauma and emotional upheaval, we were fortunate to have a supportive network of family members and friends and, above all, an unwavering faith in God.

Ewe Jin was diagnosed with NPC or nasopharyngeal carcinoma by doctors at the Universiti Hospital in Petaling Jaya. The cancer, fortunately, was in Stage 1.

The prognosis was good. "Mr Soo, you have a higher chance of being knocked down by a car than dying of this," one doctor cheerfully put it to us. "Anyway, in the past 12 years, we have had a 100 per cent recovery record."

Ewe Jin was put on a 35-course radiotherapy treatment. We opted to do his therapy at the Damansara Specialist Hospital because there was a long waiting list at UH.

When we first walked into the Oncology Clinic at Damansara, we saw for the first time the reality behind the cancer statistics. The patients

ranged from young to old, Muslim to Christian, Datuks to plain Pakciks.

We got to know many of them. Some were in Stage Two or Three, battling a more tenacious brand of malignant cells. Our hearts cried out especially for those who seemed to be all alone in their suffering.

I wondered, was there any purpose for this twist of events in our lives? No doubt we will discover in due time. For now, we are just thankful that God remained faithful to us and saw Ewe Jin and me through this journey.

In the past months, we also gained some insights into how to respond to crises in ways that will help rather than hinder.

Prayer

As soon as we “raised the alarm”, family and friends prayed with us and for us. It is an immense source of comfort to know that this huge cloud of supplication for Ewe Jin was and is still going up daily to our Heavenly Father!

I must say, though, that Ewe Jin and I have our own convictions about physical healing. We have prayed for sick friends, too, and we know from experience that for every person who is healed through prayer, at least one other is not.

(I would like to differentiate physical healing from a healing of the spirit, which we believe comes to all who seek it.)

So where does it put God when physical heal-



ing does not come? Do we blame the person's faithlessness? Is God so petty that He will not heal if there are doubts playing in our minds? Is God so powerless that little obstacles can get in the way of His healing?

In Ewe Jin's case specifically, Ewe Jin and I have full confidence that he will be totally healed. But this is based on the doctors' prognosis as much as it is on faith in God. If it were a case of Stage Three cancer, say, would we be so quick to say it is God's will that he is healed?

Ultimately, Ewe Jin and I believe that "God is in His heaven and all is right with the world". For us, come healing or disease, God is still in charge. We will trust Him fully to unfold our lives for us according to His plan.

Prescriptions

In the short span of two weeks, we were overloaded with advice on diet, medication and cures.

We accepted them in the spirit they were given, with love. However, the point is that we had been told in no uncertain terms by the doctor that we should stay clear of alternative cures for the duration of radiotherapy.

Therapy is tiring and trying for both patient and caregiver. And having to listen to endless stories about how a neighbour or colleague was cured by wheatgrass juice or some other herb can wear us out. We don't really want to know the details of someone else's cancer at that point. This is

truly a lesson for me. Previously, I proffered such advice whenever someone confided in me that a loved one had cancer. Now I know I should just listen, for that is what helps more.

Presents

Although Ewe Jin did not hold a permanent job then, we told everyone we could manage financially. Still, when cash was quietly slipped into our hands or banked into our account, we were grateful.

We appreciated a half crate of green apples given to us for juicing. And a regular supply of home-cooked dhal curry. And vitamins to keep our resistance up. Cards and letters also gave much comfort.

In short, thoughtful presents given from the heart are always a balm to tired spirits.

I must also share the instance when Ewe Jin's throat took such a battering from the X-rays he was unable to swallow even liquids. He was admitted into hospital to go on the drip.

The one-night stay in hospital set us back by RM1,200. We deliberated over whether we should ask family and friends for help. After all, the Bible says ask and you will be given. Then we remembered, it says to ask God, so we simply brought our needs to God.

Within three days, the cash came in three parts – RM500, RM500 and then RM200. What perfect arithmetic! What a wonderful God!



We learnt to depend only on Him to provide, and are still learning this daily.

Presence

Unlike presents, your presence is less straight-forward. To be frank, Ewe Jin and I found some people's presence uplifting, others' strength-sapping.

Before you visit someone with cancer, ask yourself the purpose of your visit. Don't go if it is just to reassure yourself that your loved one is all right.

In all likelihood, the person may be fighting the disease well but side-effects of therapy are beginning to show – perhaps mouth blisters, scorched skin, a sore throat and so on. In such a condition, having to reassure visitors is no easy task and really unfair on the patient!

On the other hand, Ewe Jin has a friend who showed up each day at the oncology clinic where his radiotherapy was administered. This friend simply waited with Ewe Jin, read his newspaper, then went off when the session was over. These visits became a part of his schedule.

He didn't fuss over Ewe Jin's progressively obvious side effects. He simply offered support by being there.

This experience has taught me that when visiting a patient, your presence must give support and comfort, or else it defeats the purpose. When in doubt, ask first. If your presence will not help, the caregiver will tell you. Postpone the visit; you can do your part in other ways.

Learning is a life-long process. It was certainly a steep learning curve for us. Despite the discomfort and inconveniences, I believe we have come out the richer for it.

On July 4, Ewe Jin was scheduled to read scripture in the KL Wesley Methodist Church, where we worship. He thanked the church for its prayers and support.

He had come a long way. So have I. And we both know that we would never have made it without the enduring goodness of God.

A word from the patient

On the Sunday just before I found out about my cancer, the sermon was about how God never gives us strength in advance. When we need to climb a hill, the pastor said, God will give us the strength to climb a hill. And when we need to climb a mountain, God will give us the strength to climb a mountain.

As I went through this tumultuous journey, it was truly the Lord who sustained me at each turn. God not only sustained and strengthened me but He ensured that Angeline was my pillar, my fortress and the tree planted by the water that refuses to be moved.

She surprised all of us with her efficient running of the household and making sure that this interference caused the minimum amount of disturbance to our family. Angeline climbed hills and mountains. She forded raging rivers. With her by



my side, I was able to concentrate on my treatment and recovery. Thank you Lord for such a wonderful wife!

“Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.” – Jeremiah 17:14

“I am the Lord who heals you.” – Exodus 15:26

This article was published in Wesley Tidings, the church newsletter, in 1999

Ewe Jin's thoughts

When we first thought of putting this booklet together, I wondered if my story was worth the telling. What's so special about my journey? Many have travelled this road before. Many have written more inspiring books.

But I am convinced that my story is unique in its own way. I lost my fourth sister and my father to cancer. I had travelled alongside them on both their journeys and each time it was different.

When my sister was diagnosed with cancer, all of us in the family were shocked and we were left groping very much in the dark. When I look back on her final months, I realise that she was seeking answers that none of us could provide then. As the faraway brother, I could do little more than send back money and make the occasional trip to see her. I was there when she breathed her last but felt helpless that I couldn't do more.

When my father was diagnosed with cancer, I was able to offer some comfort. I had found God by then and just knowing that He cared and would take care of my father made the journey a bit more bearable. I spoke to my father of my faith and was there when he, too, breathed his last.

Having watched two loved ones go this way, it was a wonder that when it came to my turn, I did not feel that death had come a-knocking at my door. Rather, with the promise of eternal life assured, I faced my journey with a confidence that only faith could provide.



I remember how so many times, I looked at the worried faces of my visitors and I would tease them, “Why look at me as though I am going to die?” They asked me for the secret to my peace and I would reply, “Trust the doctors, and have complete faith in God.”

When cancer struck in 1999, I was on the brink of getting back into the workforce. But the job that was supposedly guaranteed to me did not come. Although I was disappointed at first, I realised later that my return to work had been temporarily suspended by a Greater Power because I had to go through this trial first.

Did I pass the test? I cannot give an answer but I do know that I would have failed miserably if I did not have a Personal Saviour for comfort and for guidance. I clung to the belief that “we are never given more than we can bear”.

Exactly one year later, when the effects of my radiotherapy were long gone, I was able to get a job at *The Star*, where I am currently employed.

Wonders never cease. This booklet had to be condensed so that you can get a quick tour of what I went through and I had to leave many stories untold. What made the difference and why was this journey so special? The answer is: God made the difference.

Angeline's thoughts

We licked it. We *all* did: Ewe Jin, I, our boys Kevin and Tim, our huge extended families, many faith-

ful friends – and, most of all, a loving God who is the source of our strength and hope. Now, three years after Ewe Jin was diagnosed with cancer, he is in complete remission.

As the main caregiver to Ewe Jin during his illness, I often found myself on a roller coaster, emotionally. It was an uncomfortable ride, as I am basically a matter-of-fact kind of person and not given to great shows of emotion.

A major personal battle was learning to “walk the talk”, so to speak, and put my trust wholly in God. This was not easy even after many years as a Christian. Ewe Jin had been my pillar of strength in everything, from career decisions to paying the bills. It was a frightening experience to suddenly discover there may be cracks in the pillar.

I also worried about being left to bring up the children alone. This was a dreadful thought, not least because Ewe Jin has always been a participative parent and does more than his share with the boys.

I felt as if I was walking a tightrope with no safety net below. More than once, I collapsed in tears of despair when I had time to be by myself. The going seemed too hard to bear.

Only when I was totally drained and could no longer carry my burden in my own strength, did I surrender and let God take over. And when I did, how sweet was the relief that came! I no longer worried about the “hows” and “what ifs”.



“But he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” – 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Yes, the journey was rough. But through it all, God proved ever faithful. With Him by my side, I can face anything – even death.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.” – Psalm 23:4

I wrote this the week after my doctors gave me the five-year all-clear report on April 7 2004. It was indeed an emotional day for me even as I was prepared for the good news. I brought my camera along to take pictures of myself with Dr Gurcharan Singh and Dr Awal Hassan.

The God that healeth me

On June 7, 1999, I wrote in my journal: It's our 13th wedding anniversary and also the day when we go to UH to take the results of my liver and bone scans. Everything is clear. The cancer in my nose has not spread! I will still have to go for check-ups every six months, and record five years of remission before I am officially pronounced "cured".

On April 7, 2004, my doctors at Damansara Specialist Hospital declared me cancer-free, exactly five years after it was discovered and treated. I had been in remission all this time but the five-year mark is considered crucial from the doctors' point of view. God the Healer, of course, works on a different timetable and His assurance of my healing came very much earlier. But I am glad that the doctors can medically prove what He has promised. Although the news was expected, the day still proved to be quite emotional for me.

I sent out the SMS while still in the hospital and the replies came back fast and furious. I was very touched that friends really shouted with joy upon hearing the good news. Some of you may have already heard my testimony, and some of



you might have already read the book written by my wife and me entitled *Face to Face with Cancer*.

Five years ago, I was full of questions as to why I had to battle the Big C. Today, I believe I have no reason to doubt that the trial I had to go through has strengthened me tremendously. I thank God for it. This is my testimony.

The Journey: *I Am The God That Healeth Thee*. How many times I had listened to Don Moen sing this song. God Heals. We all know that. But healing must not be limited to just physically healing. I am fortunate in that respect but I must also say that in this five-year period, I have also lost friends to cancer. My wife and I have our own convictions about physical healing.

We have prayed for sick friends, too, and we know from experience that for every person who is healed through prayer, at least one other is not. (I would like to differentiate physical healing from a healing of the spirit, which we believe comes to all who seek it.) So where does it put God when physical healing does not come? Do we blame the person's faithlessness? Is God so petty that He will not heal if there are doubts playing in our minds? Is God so powerless that little obstacles can get in the way of His healing?

In my case specifically, our confidence is based on the doctors' prognosis as much as it is on faith in God. At all times, we believed "God is in His heaven and all is right with the world". For us, come healing or disease, God is still in charge. I

have learnt to trust Him fully to unfold my life for me according to His plan. Though I went through suffering in the early days, I also 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.

God The Provider: At the time when I was undergoing the journey, I was enjoying one of my stints as full-time father. This meant that I was not covered by any company scheme and everything that we had to spend on had to come from somewhere else. God's providence shone tremendously during this time. All bills were taken care of with the generous donations from family and friends.

Perhaps this was best exemplified when I had to be warded one day and the bill came up to RM1,200. Where was the money going to come from, we asked. Already we had been given so much for the anticipated bills but this was unexpected. We knew if we called up people, they would respond but we decided to get down on our knees to pray instead. Over the next three days, three cheques came in, two RM500 cheques and one RM200 cheque. Talk about God the perfect mathematician.

The Purpose becomes clearer with the benefit of hindsight. My experience has certainly made me a better counsellor to those who are



beginning the same journey. I am able to offer advice that is practical and useful, and speak words of comfort that don't sound hollow. I guess it's a bit like being swimming a coach who gets into the water with his students, rather than just shouting instructions from the poolside. In fact, the nurses at my onco's clinic have my phone number handy, and they give it out to new patients who are distraught and need someone to talk to. I count that as a privilege, for in helping others in this way, I myself have been truly blessed.

And finally, **the Perspective** I have gained is one of Thankfulness. There are a million things we should thank God for the moment we wake up each morning, but too often we take them all for granted. I try to impart this attitude of thankfulness to people whose paths cross mine. I have given my *Cancer* booklet to colleagues who are burdened by job problems, or friends going through a rough patch, and each time they call back to say that my story has helped them to take a step back from their problems and to realise that they are really very fortunate indeed.

Yes, cancer does have a way of making other problems seem small!

The Ten Commandments for cancer survival

1. Thou shalt regard the word “cancer,” as exactly that: a word. Nothing more, nothing less. For its original meaning has changed mightily over the years, as have such words as smallpox and polio, all once dreaded ailments, now non-existent as maladies. And thus shalt go thy cancer. The answer shall come to those who shall be present to hear it. Be present when it comes.
2. Thou shalt love thy chemotherapy, thy radiation, and thy other treatments even as thyself, for they are thy friends and champions. Although they exact a toll for their endeavours, they are oft most generous in the favours they bestow.
3. Thou shalt participate fully in thy recovery. Thou shalt learn all the details of thy ailment, its diagnosis, its prognosis, its treatments, conventional and alternative. Thou shalt discuss them openly and candidly with thy oncologist and shalt question all thou do not comprehend. Then, thou shalt cooperate intelligently and knowledgeably with thy doctor.
4. Thou shalt regard thy ailment as a temporary detour in thy life and shalt plan thy future as though this detour had not occurred. Thou shalt never, at no time, no how, regard



thy temporary ailment as permanent. Thou shalt set long-term goals for thyself for thou WILL verily recover and thy believing so will contribute mightily to thy recovery.

5. Thou shalt express thy feelings candidly and openly to thy loved ones for they, too, are stricken. Thou shalt comfort and reassure them for they, too, needest comforting and reassurance, even as thou doest.
6. Thou shalt be a comfort to thy fellow-cancerites, providing knowledge, encouragement, understanding and love. Thou shalt give them hope where there may be none, for only in hope lies their salvation. And by doing so, thou providest comfort for thyself, as well.
7. Thou shalt never relinquish hope, no matter how thou may feelest at that moment, for thou knowest, in the deep recesses of thy heart, that thy discouragement is but fleeting and that a better day awaits thee.
8. Thou shalt not regard thy ailment as the sum total of thy life but as merely a part of it. Fill your life with other diversions, be they mundane, daring, altruistic, or merely amusing. To fill your life with thy ailment is to surrender to it.
9. Thou shalt maintain, at all times and in all circumstances, thy sense of humour, for laughter lightens thy heart and hastens thy

recovery. This is not an easy task, sometimes seemingly impossible, but it is a goal well worth the endeavour.

10. Thou shalt have enduring and unassailable faith, whether thy faith be in a Supreme Being, in Medical Science, in Thy Future, in Thyself, or in Whatever. Steadfastly sustain thy faith for it shall sustain thee.

By Paul H Klein

Source: www.lymphomation.org





DON'T QUIT

DON'T quit when the
tide is lowest,
For it's just about to turn;
Don't quit over doubts and
questions,
For there's something you
may learn.

Don't quit when the night
is darkest,
For it's just a while 'til dawn;
Don't quit when you've run
the farthest,
For the race is almost won.

Don't quit when the hill
is steepest,
For your goal is almost nigh;
Don't quit, for you're not
a failure
Until you fail to try.

– *Jill Wolf*

