

100 Beach Way, Moss Beach, CA  
94038, USA 12/29/10

Dear Friends

Several of you friends and relations have had medical problems this year, and so have I. They loom so large that it is hard to write the kind of cheerful letter that usually comes so easily. So let me start with my sepsis, and come back to the early year later.

Moss Beach CA, 11/22/10

I was in Villars, Switzerland four weeks ago. I had so looked forward to it. It had snowed and was very pretty. Normally I would have found cross country skis and enjoyed myself, but I had a bad cough and was very tired. I had to push to give my three hours of lectures, and do the evening tutorials. I was then supposed to stay another week to mark my exam questions. But, feeling so sick, I apologized, coached Alex on the questions, and flew back to California. The cough got better, but I was still very tired. A week later, I was due to attend a 3 day workshop in Monterey and give a lecture on the last afternoon. I skipped the first two days, but had Magdalena drive me down on the third afternoon. I gave the lecture, apologized, took my computer, and fled. Half an hour later on the highway, Magdalena had to stop while I vomited on the side of the road. That night my temperature was 102.4. Next morning, in the local Emergency Room, they found that I had a urinary infection, gave me antibiotics, and sent me home. That night my temperature hit 103.6. Back in the Emergency room in the morning, they told us that it was an E. Coli infection, and that it was in my blood: sepsis. An ambulance took us to Peninsular Hospital.



Peninsular Hospital, Burlingame, CA. 11/15/10

The accessible world is very small. I can reach things over a length of only a couple of feet, a few inches wide, on a window sill alongside my hospital bed. There is a rolling table over the bed. Three times a day, it holds my identical 'clear liquid' meal of broth, herbal tea (I hate herbal tea), and an ice Popsicle guaranteed to contain no fruit, or sugar. Now there is just some cold water, paper cups, and, though out of reach, a pen and paper. I tried hooking my toe on the table to pull it closer, but the movement caused the pen to roll off onto the inaccessible territory of the floor. The things in my accessible space are of immense importance: cell phone, paper and pen (now lost), my diary, address book, and a urine container. If anybody tidies those few items –

accidentally moving something out of reach – I want to kill. But a gun is not in the accessible space, so I can only rage, push the nurse call button, and try and be patient. Pain comes in waves. The nurse fits morphine into the IV, and peace returns.

Peninsular Hospital, Burlingame, CA. Later

After 24 hours, the accessible world has grown immensely. Though attached by tubes, I can sit up and even slide off the side of the bed and stand to pee into the container. Real food is brought, though, still nauseous, I can eat little. Magdalena comes, but I cannot really talk. She looks worried.

By the next day, I am shuffling along the corridor, pushing my IV stand along in front of me. My world seems huge: the whole seventh floor. From the windows I can see ambulances coming and going, and normal people walking and chatting in the still lost world outside. Though I was brought here in an ambulance, like those I see, I have little memory of it. Even the Emergency Rooms seem distant.

After another day, I am feeling stronger and they tell me that I could be discharged tomorrow, but for my Creatinine level (2.4) that means that my kidneys are barely functioning. Plans for dialysis are discussed. Each year, 20-25% of those on dialysis, die. Getting a donor kidney for one my age is rare. This was horrible.



Home

I stayed in the hospital for another couple of days, as they hydrated me to flush the kidneys, then restricted the liquids because it might be over-working them, then hydrated me again, and decided – with Creatinine down to 1.6 – that I did not need dialysis immediately, that they expected I would fully recover, and could go home. Now, 6 weeks later, my Creatinine level is 1.15 and normal. I am spared this time.

The accessible world has continued to grow. When first home, I stayed only downstairs. When first going outside, I walked only half a block, and came home exhausted. Later, I was walking ever further, but had to plan a route from park bench to park bench. Eventually I logged on and faced 600 emails. After three weeks, I could fly back to New York for 10 days, to see the Grandchildren and do some essential work at the Lab. Since returning, I have made it to the top of our local 1800 ft mountain, and hiked the Purissima Creek. My world is returned to me. I am happy. But also a little more humble. Sepsis can strike again. 30% do not make it. There is not much I can do to avoid it. A little hypochondria might help, but that is not so easy for me, even if life may depend on it. I peel my apples and wash my strawberries.

I did not get to England this year, but In February our whole family made it to another Caribbean cruise: Sue, me, Devan, Magdalena, Sammy, Geanine, Malcolm, and Carl. This was a first. Unfortunately the weather was cool and stormy. Do not believe anybody that tells you that cruise ships are too big to make anybody sea-sick.



Later in the year, but before my sickness, I had a great hike up Snow Mountain with Joel. My work has been going well, and I got another prize. Somehow I seemed to spend a lot of time in NY, while Magdalena was in sunny California. But I got exercise cutting up a dead willow and sent her pictures of her Lilies that were, for once spared by the deer.

But there was one occasion that Magdalena did not miss: Devan's First Communion. Remember that our in-laws are an Italian family, and so this was a big occasion with everybody there, including:



The communicants



Malcolm



Geanine



Dev



Sammy



Mima (Magdalena)



Beeps (me)



Lauren & John



Harry & Spencer



Aunt Fran



Aunt Mary



Ada (Mal's birth Mother)



Sue



Max



Sidney



Jill



Scotty



Gina's Father



Gina's Mother



Gina



Roger



I am going to end this year's letter with one of 9 year old Devan's stories: banged out at speed with two fingers on his parent's Mac lap-top. I have added some punctuation and capitalization, but it is otherwise much as he wrote it. This was for fun. What he does for schoolwork has none of its invention.

### **Mint's adventure to Black Knight of Doom**

Once there was a Mint, and he was very sad. Then a big castle and two knights came and took Mint's crown. Mint tried to grab the crown, but a knight said: "No grab, Mint." "Nooooooooo!" said Mint, "give it back!" Then Mint went into the castle, and a knight kicked him out. It was a combat-fire-super-ultra-kick, and Mint landed on an island. It was called Sander Beach. "Huh," the Mint said. Then a guy named Mix said: "S'up bro, huh!" The Mint said: "You want to play Goldfish?" "Sure," Mint said: "Yes, okay. Let's play now." "Do you have any 10s?", and Mint said: "Ugh". Then seven hours later he said "Gosh this is a boring game. I'm going home."

Just then, a big pirate ship came to destroy Mint. The pirate said: "I would run if I were you". Mint said: "Oh my gosh", and ran at the same time. Then the pirate started shooting bombs. It was worst for Mint, badly. Mix was riding a car and said: "Jump in". "No, but why?" said Mint, "Because I don't trust you". "Please, you will die." "Okay", Mint said, "So move over let me drive." "Fine", Mix said. Then they went into the water. "But the pirate is still following us." The car changed into a sub, to go under water, and the pirate went away. Mint said: "Where are we?" Mix said: "We are under water". Then Mix said: "Let's go for a swim in the water. I got tight swimming outfit. Okay?" Mint said: "Let's go". The sub then shrank down to a little ball; then it popped. "Let's swim, okay? I see a lot of fish.... and I see a shark!" "Run, okay? I told you that it's dangerous under water." But the shark was a robot! "Huh," we said together. Mint said: "this is very odd". Then a guy came and said: "hello". We said: "Huh!" "Hi, let me introduce myself. My name is Dr. Kallypoo." "Hello," said Mix. Then Mint said: "Why do you have a robot shark?" "Because I want to make a good invention." "Oh", said Mint. Then Dr. Kallypoo said: "See what I said five minutes ago, to get rid of it." "Come on", said Mix. "Okay." But then Mint got taken by a bird. "Help!" he said and Mix said: "How are there birds under water?" Oh.....

Mint was taken to a nest, a bird's nest. He was dropped into the nest. Mint said: "Are these baby birds?" But the mother bird was going to feed Mint to the baby birds. "Oh no," said Mint, "Oh yea." So Mint jumped out of the nest and said: "HELP!!!!!!!!!!!!!" Then Mint landed on a monster. But the good thing was that he was asleep. Then the monster woke up. "Oh no!" Mint jumped off. The monster saw Mint and said: "What the heck." Mint said: "I need to get my crown back". "Sure," said the monster, "I have a teleporter. I will teleport you back to your home." "Yes please, because one of the knights did a combat-fire-super-ultra-kick at me, and I went so far you could not even see me." "Okay," said the monster, "let's teleport, okay?" Weeeeeeee. "Hey, I am back, and the castle is still there. It's my chance. I will sneak into the castle. The knights did not see me. Oh my gosh: my crown. I am going to run to get the crown. Let's do this; yes?" "Give it back." said a voice. It was the king of the castle. "Get him knights!" the king said. But when the crown is on Mint's head, he has powers. So Mint said: "Punch-kick-fire-ball." "Oh no", said the knights, and the king of the castle exploded, and the knights and the king all die, and Mint said: "Wow, I'm going home."

Devan Palmer 12/9/10

With much love

Bob, Robert, Rob, Uncle Rob, Beepa.... (as appropriate)

