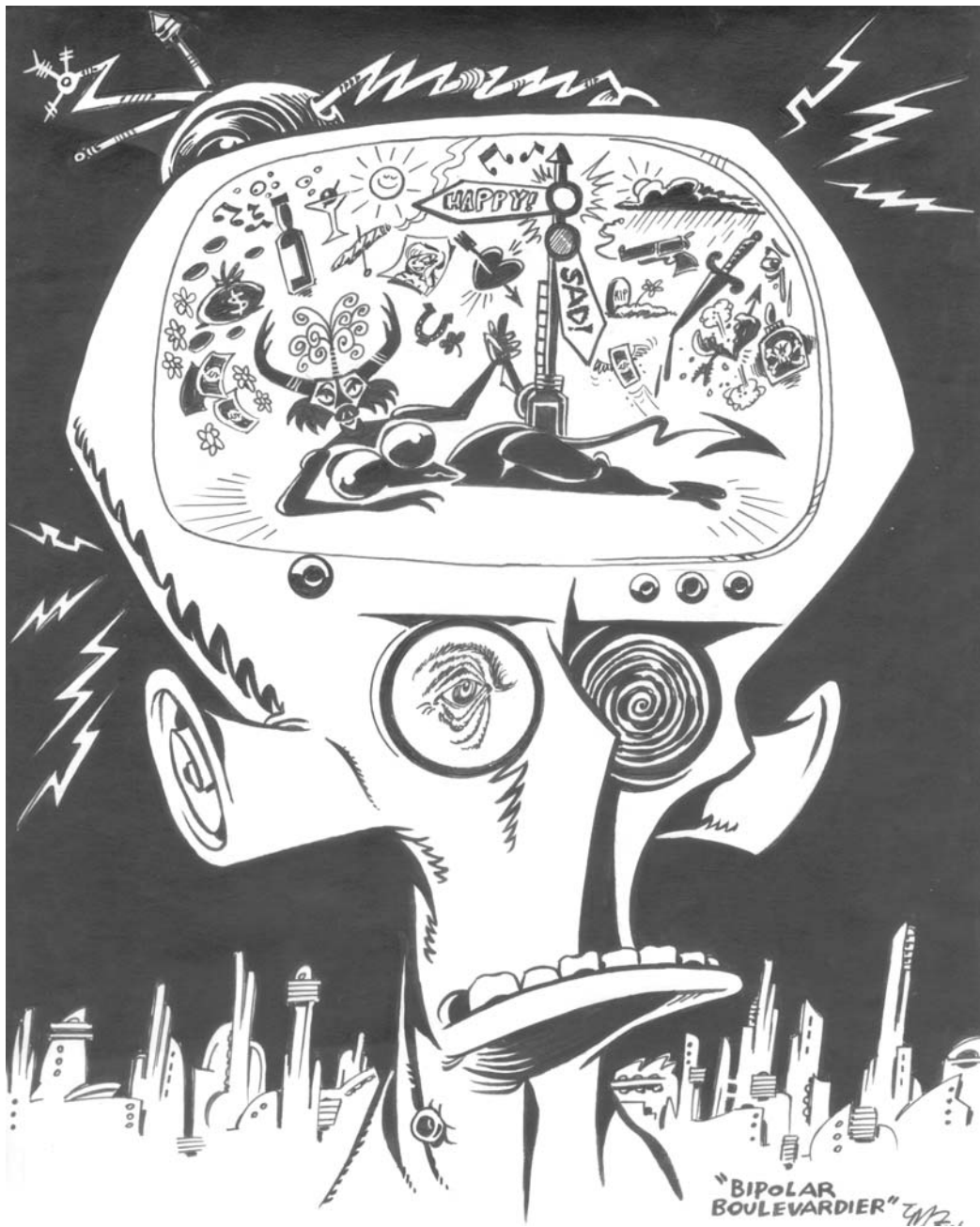


Visions of Paradise

#111: *The Passing Scene*



Visions of Paradise

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Artwork

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Out of the Depths

I joined another book club recently, bringing my total to a relatively modest 5 book clubs (which I am sure is fewer than some of my readers). I hope to stay in three of them:

- the Science Fiction Book Club (of course!). I have been a member of it on and off since 1967 when my first two selections were Roger Zelazny's **Lord of Light** and Harlan Ellison's **Dangerous Visions**;
- The Discovery Channel Book Club, which I joined a year ago, and which mostly has books about history, anthropology, travel, occasional "hard" sciences. So far my purchases from them have been the travel books **The Empire of Genghis Khan** and **Frontiers of Heaven**, both by Stanley Stewart, **In Search of Robinson Crusoe**, by Tim Severin, the historical novel **Pompeii**, by Robert Harris, Stephen King's collection of fiction and nonfiction **Secret Windows**, **The Conclave**, a history of papal elections, an anthology of true life adventures **The Outside 25**, and two books on the development of modern humans, **The Book of Life** and **The Ancestor's Tale**;
- The History Book Club, my newest membership, from which I received 4 free books when I joined: **Charlemagne**, a biography by Derek Wilson, and three historical novels: **Empress**, by Shan Sa, **Ireland**, by Frank Delaney, and **The March**, by E.L. Doctorow;
- I have been a member of The Quality Paperback Book Club for several years, but now that I have joined two more interesting clubs I will gladly let this membership cease;
- Ditto for The Book of the Month Club. I rarely buy any books from this club, but they had an introductory offer a few years ago which I could not resist.

I have also been reading **Archaeology Magazine** recently, and have enjoyed it enough that I have subscribed to it for a year. It's only published 6 times a year, so I can deal with that.

*

Some brief random thoughts...

I am generally suspicious of the writing talent of offspring who make their living off the ideas of their parent, such as Brian Herbert, Christopher Tolkien, and Todd McCaffrey. Of course, I might feel differently about this if my father had been Robert A. Heinlein.

When he was editor of **Galaxy** and **Worlds of IF**, Frederik Pohl was a fabulous editor (consider how those magazines dominated Hugo nominations in the 60s) who was generally considered a mid-rank writer whose best works had been in collaboration with Cyril M. Kornbluth. Shortly after he retired as editor, he published the novella "The Gold at the Starbow's End," followed soon by the novels **Man Plus** and **Gateway**, and almost immediately he was considered one of

the major sf writers of his generation, a reputation which has grown considerably in the decades since.

I have not watched a science fiction tv show regularly since **Star Trek: The Next Generation**, but I am always open to suggestions. In spite of their critical reception, I missed both **Babylon 5** and the first season of **Doctor Who**. I did watch the first season of **Battlestar Galactica**, which I generally enjoyed, but somehow I never returned for a second season.

*

Generations...

Two days ago I was a child and my family was living in a small two-family house, 12 people sharing many of the same problems that most extended families experience. Two of the people were my grandparents who were probably a lot younger than I realized at the time.

A day ago I graduated college and began my young adult life. Soon afterwards Jean and I got married and began our family, while my parents moved on to the next stage of their own lives as they retired from their jobs and began enjoying their “golden years.”

Today Jean and I are in our “middle age,” looking ahead to our own retirement as our sons are graduating college and beginning their own young adult lives. Meanwhile, Jean’s parents are both gone, while my father died last summer and my mother died this November.

I will never forget the one bit of advice Jean’s father gave us when we were married. He told us that we cannot possibly imagine how quickly the next 40 years will pass, that before we know it we will be at the tail end of our lives, looking back rather than looking ahead.

He sure as heck was telling the truth.

*

Since 1966 I have selected one book each year as my book-of-the-year. The rules are simple: it is the best book I read during the previous calendar year, no matter when it was first published. In recent years my choices have been K.J. Bishop’s **The Etched City** in 2005 and Guy Gavriel Kay’s **The Last Light of the Sun** in 2004. The two years prior to that both went to historical fiction by Iain Pears, **An Instance of the Fingerpost** in 2002 and **A Dream of Scipio** in 2003.

This past year I read 5 books which deserve consideration for book-of-the-year. Three of them were Alastair Reynolds’ *Conjoiner-Inhibitor* trilogy **Revelation Space**, **Redemption Ark** and **Absolution Gap**. Their combination of sense of wonder, far-future extrapolation, exotic characters, and strong storytelling made them an absolute delight.

The fourth book was Robert Charles Wilson’s Hugo-winning **Spin**, a near-future study of how humanity might cope with a “big dumb object” which totally transforms life on Earth. This book inhabited the more literary end of the sf spectrum, but was no less thought-provoking because of it.

The fifth book is one I have not yet reviewed in these pages, although I have already posted the review on my sf blog, and which will appear in January's *Wondrous Stories*. The book is Jack McDevitt's **Seeker**, the third novel in his *Alex Benedict* series begun with **A Talent for War** and continued in **Polaris**. This book is nearly as wondrous as Reynolds' series, although where Reynolds envisions life in the far future as intrinsically different than contemporary life on Earth, a modern space opera viewpoint, McDevitt takes a more 50ish viewpoint where the basic technology might change but people are still basically people.

It was hard to choose one space opera over another, but what I think ultimately drove me toward McDevitt was the fact that his book is slower-paced, more concerned with exploration and historical mystery than Reynolds' adventures in space. I loved both of them, but I am more likely to remember McDevitt's search for the spaceship *Seeker* and the colony world Margolia than Reynolds' battles among the various groups of Inhibitors and Conjoiners.

Seeker also contained enough thoughtfulness that it was a strong contender to **Spin** in that regard, while **Spin** could not match **Seeker** in storytelling and sense of wonder. So in a close three-way battle, I have selected Jack McDevitt's **Seeker** as my book of the year.

Where I to select a favorite short story of last year, it would definitely be Jeffrey Ford's "A Cosmology of the Wider World." I hope I am not too far out of the mainstream of sf critics because I believe that story certainly deserved at least one major award nomination.



The Passing Scene

September 2006

Saturday, Sept 2: Ah, a four-day weekend before school starts in earnest Tuesday. This will be a very busy year, since I am teaching 5 different preps, including new curricula for AP Calculus BC and Algebra 2, plus I am still not totally comfortable teaching AP Statistics, so collectively they will require a lot of preparation.

I still have a few chores to finish, including sorting through our financial records in the basement. However, I cannot finish that this weekend, so I will try to do some of it this fall until it is done. We don't need every single paper/receipt/statement from as far back as 1979, plus getting rid of thousands and thousands of sheets will give us more storage room in the basement. Some of those sheets need to be shredded, which is a very time-consuming job, but Jean has been doing that part of it.

I'm reading the 2005 **Year's Best Science Fiction** this weekend. Since I do not have time to read novels during school, I will spend most of the fall catching up on magazines, including back issues of fictionzines **Paradox**, **Fantasy Magazine**, and **Postscripts**, nonfiction zines **Paste** (a rock magazine), **Archaeology**, **Solander** (historical fiction articles) and **Historical Novels Review**, plus my extensive collection of unread **Galaxy**.. I could easily spend an entire year without buying any books or new issues of magazines, but reading is my passion and my interests are so broad, how could I possibly stop buying completely? That would make my life so colorless. ☹

Monday, Sept 4: The last day of summer vacation! *sniff* It seems like so many people I know are retired now: Alan & Denise, three of my neighbors, my two friends Tom (one being Tom Sadler). The fact that I am expecting a difficult school year makes my attitude at the start of this school year less than stellar. Oh, well, at least I am still young enough to keep working!

Tomorrow is my mother's colostomy. It is the first day of school, so I cannot be there. Although there are no classes the first day, there are things my department needs from me, plus I must get a bit organized before classes start Thursday. Fortunately, Stephen will be at the hospital, since one of us needs to be there for any emergency decisions which need to be made during the operation. This is a very scary operation considering she is 84 years old and her overall attitude has not been particularly positive recently.

Thursday, Sept 7: My mother's operation was pushed back until noon, so I left school at 11:15am and went to Hackettstown Hospital. Stephen and Doreen were there when I arrived. We went with my mother when she was wheeled to the pre-operation area. The operation took about 90 minutes, and when she was brought back to her room she looked amazingly good for an 84-year old woman who just had major surgery. The surgeon did not put a permanent catheter to my mother's bladder because the urologist discouraged it, thinking it might cause spasms and also leakage which would defeat the purpose of having it.

Shortly after returning to her room, my mother ate dinner, her first solid meal in nearly a week. Of course, this is only the first step in trying to heal the extensive radiation-wound which is her main problem, and which is so painful my mother—who actually has a high level of tolerance—screams whenever the nurses clean it. She and the nurses all cry together at those times, which indicates how painful it must be for her.

I had my first classes today, 5 different preps squeezed into 6 periods, so I was totally exhausted at the end of the day. 4 of my classes seem fine: my ESL class currently has 5 incredibly-cute Chinese and Indian students; my Honors Algebra 2 has 30 students in it, a very-large class size; my AP Calculus and AP Statistics classes are mostly students I have had before; however, I have a few kids with attitudes in my regular Algebra 2 class, which Megan verified when she looked at my roster. I anticipate having no problem intimidating them enough not to give me any discipline problems. I don't need aggravation in addition to this tough schedule.

Saturday, Sept 9: I was exhausted the past two evenings after my first full days of school. Four members of my department—Adrienne, Maryann, Andy and me—teach 5 periods out of 6 during the day. What an exhausting schedule!

Last night we went to Panera's (where I had onion soup and a chicken sandwich, while Jean had broccoli cheddar soup and chicken salad), then to the mall awhile. I bought the annual double issue of **F&SF**. Last week I bought the double issue of **Asimov's**. Since I do not subscribe to prozines anymore, not having the time to keep up with monthly reading, I buy a few issues every year, and the double issues have more novellas, which I prefer.

Thursday, Sept 14: The first full week of school is always exhausting, but this one was aggravated by the first *Target Teach* seminar Monday night. This is a class taught by myself and three other district teachers which trains a group of seniors in teaching, in anticipation of their being education majors in college. I got slightly more than 6 hours of sleep that night which carried over the entire week. Tuesday I had a late PTHEA Executive Board meeting as well. Wednesday I had a raging headache and was so exhausted I slept for an hour after I got home.

I am already so backed up in my work at home that the pile on my desk is huge, including paperwork I need to do for my mother. I really wish it were summer again!

Saturday, Sept 16: Last night Jean and I went to the Chinese Buffet with Alan & Denise, then we all visited my mother. Her night nurse Cassandra (who is one of her two outstanding nurses, along with her day nurse Amy) was very upset because my mother still has problems which the colostomy hoped to alleviate. She left a message with my mother's doctor because she thinks the doctors need to look into why my mother is not healing better.

Tuesday, Sept 19: Fei Fei phoned Sunday and we had our usual nice talk. She is working very hard teaching a graduate vision course that she is basically learning as she goes along. She estimates she is spending 15 hours per week preparing for a 3-hour course. She says it is material that is good for her to know, so at least it is not wasted time.

Today was a Rep Council meeting, and I realized that one of the elementary reps would be an

excellent chief negotiator, so I asked him if he is interested. He admitted he needs training, so I encouraged him to take leadership training this winter. If he becomes negotiator, then Joe can become president instead of me so I will not have to make such a huge time commitment next year.

All the time I spend copying/collating/ mailing **VoP** is a lot of wasted time, so I have decided to no longer mail non-FAPA copies, but instead post the entire issue online at Efanzone.com. People who prefer can receive the zine as email attachments, which means I need to convert it to WORD format. I will also try to publish smaller monthly issues, alternating *The Passing Scene* with *Wondrous Stories* and *Halcyon Days*, which should ease my workload a bit too.

Thursday, Sept 20: When I got home from school yesterday Jean told me that Amy, my mother's nurse at Sub-Acute Health Care, could not reach me so she phoned Stephen to tell him that she was sending my mother back to Hackettstown Hospital for several reasons: her stoma had gotten too recessed to function properly without leaking, her hemoglobin was low, and she had bacteria in her urine. This morning the surgeon operated again, but before and afterwards she talked to us a lot longer than she did previously. My mother's health situation is very precarious and the outlook is not as positive as it seemed prior to her colostomy.

Yesterday Andy's car was towed away after Jean donated it to a charity. At least it will be a tax deduction for us. Andy has over \$11,000 saved, some of it from his savings bonds, so he can afford to buy a newer used car when he returns from his internship at Disney World.

Saturday, Sept 23: Thursday night Jean and I returned to Hackettstown Hospital where my mother was so disoriented she really did not have much idea what was happening.

Last night Jean and I went to our first yoga class at CCM. It was 80 minutes and I really enjoyed it. I felt some of the stretching in my back which is slightly stiffer this morning than usual, but overall I was more flexible than I thought I would be and it felt very good. Jean and I will try to do some yoga at home as well, alternating with my nightly back and abdomen strengthening exercises.

When we got home Jean and I emptied the office and the dining room, so the house is a mess right now. The rugs need stretching badly, but they phoned this morning and said their truck broke down so they cannot come until tomorrow. So today we are surrounded by chaos, and tomorrow we will spend the entire day putting my office back together. It took over an hour to move everything out, but it will likely take 2-3 times as long putting everything back where it belongs. *sigh* Thank heavens we have 2 computers.

I am reading H.V. Morton's classic **A Traveler in Rome** which combines travel with history, and is absolutely fascinating, especially since I have seen many of the places he discusses. But it is the history which makes this book more interesting than a pure travel book would be.

Sunday, Sept 24: At 4:30am this morning I was awakened by a phone call from the overnight attending physician at the hospital. He told me that my mother's sugar count was very low and was not rising even though they had given her crackers, orange juice, and sugar. Then he

frightened me by discussing my mother's living will which states that extraordinary means will not be used to prolong her life artificially. I insisted that he use whatever means are necessary to save her life, and that if a situation is reached where extraordinary means are being used, then the decision to eliminate them will be made jointly by the family with my mother's doctor.

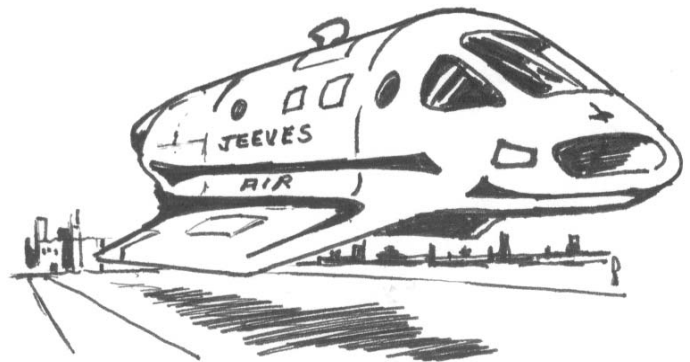
I phoned Stephen immediately, and Jean suggested he and I go to the hospital to see what was actually happening, and make sure the doctor did not do anything threatening to my mother. He, Doreen and I arrived at 5:00am and talked to the night nurse, then the doctor. Meanwhile the glucose treatment they gave her raised her blood sugar count to 121, which is in the normal range.

Overall my mother's condition has deteriorated steadily the past few months. Besides the radiation wound and anemia and sugar level, she also has an infection for which she is being given antibiotics in her IV, and her mental state has steadily worsened the longer she stays in bed. It is highly unlikely she will ever return fully to the person she was before this all began last June.

Saturday, Sept 30: This has been such a busy week (Wednesday I had a TTP planning meeting after school, and Thursday was Back-to-School Night) I have not had time to update my journal, and the pile of mail on my desk is huge. Fortunately I have a three-day weekend due to Yom Kippur, so I am hoping to catch up on some of it by Monday.

October 2006

Saturday, Oct 7: Wednesday after school I went to the YMCA, where I have been trying to go one afternoon each week (Jean and I always go once per weekend too). Thursday night Jean and I visited my mother at the hospital where we saw Stephen and Doreen. My mother had also been walking with an aide a bit during the day and seemed more "with it" than usual.



Today was Michael & Johna's surprise 25th wedding anniversary party, which was originally planned by Janel, but Jean quietly took it over from her. There were 30 people at our house, including several friends of theirs whom I do not know.

Tuesday, Oct 10: Last night was the monthly TTP seminar, so I am somewhat tired today. At least I got a lot of work done at school—including copying **VoP** #107 for FAPA, which is the end of my copying for that issue.

Saturday, Oct 14: Jean and I went to TCNJ for Family Day. On the way we stopped at Reebok outlet in Flemington where we each bought a pair of sneakers, then we went to Mark's house where we took him and Kate to Olive Garden for lunch (courtesy of our Discover Card bonus

points). Mark had lasagna, Kate had a pizza topped with pepper, onion, mushroom and olives, Jean had Tuscan chicken in a creamy sauce on fettucini, and I had stuffed chicken breast with garlic mashed potatoes.

Monday, Oct 16: Yesterday was Chris and Sarah Koegel's baby shower. I dropped Jean off at Lina's Restaurant in Bloomingdale, then I drove to Rick's house where I spent 3 hours with him and his sons. Rick plans to retire in 7 years, and he will move either to Pennsylvania (where they bought land at the same community where Jean, Ceil and I went for a presentation once) or else go to North Carolina. Barb is no longer working at St. Joseph's Hospital, but at a hospital in Montclair. Chris is living in Maryland and works for Amtrak in their legal department.

Saturday, Oct 21: Yesterday Route 80 was closed in the afternoon and evening due to a truck which spilled hazardous materials on the roadway after hitting the center divider in a one-vehicle accident. I could not get home at all from the chiropractor, so I went to Wendy's for supper and browsed at Barnes & Noble until I met Jean at CCM for the 6:30pm yoga class. She ate supper at home with Mark who has a four-day Fall Break.

A busy weekend. Besides visiting my mother and going to the YMCA, I have 3 tests to write and the usual pile of paperwork to handle, including some bills of my mother that I do not want to pay until I investigate her AARP insurance to see if they will pay one bill. I will phone Heath Village about the other bill.

Tuesday, Oct 24: Mark and Kate had a four-day Fall Break weekend, so Sunday they drove to Connecticut to spend two days visiting Mystic Seaport, a large aquarium, and the casinos at Foxwoods, a Native American gambling complex.

Monday, Oct 30: Thursday afternoon Jean picked me up after school and we drove to Newark Airport for our flight to Orlando, Florida to visit Andy during his internship at Disney World.

Friday morning we had the free continental breakfast at Comfort Inn, including toast, oatmeal, cereal, muffins and donuts, coffee and juice. Andy walked from his dorm about 20 minutes away to meet us afterwards, and we took the shuttle bus to Epcot where we spent the day. There were absolutely no crowds at all, so we never spent more than 10 minutes waiting to get into any attraction. I particularly enjoyed *Mission Space*, *Spaceship Earth*, *Ellen's Energy Adventure*, *Honey I Shrunk the Audience*, the Mexico and Norway boat rides, and the China and France wraparound movies.

We ate lunch at the Chinese restaurant. Andy left for work at 5:00pm, but *Beaches and Cream* restaurant is part of the *Boat and Yacht Resort*, one of the Epcot resorts, and was only walking distance away. Later Jean and I walked there and met a few of his co-workers, then bought ice cream.

Saturday morning after breakfast Andy walked to Comfort Inn again and we rode the shuttle bus to MGM Studios. It was so uncrowded we saw every single attraction, especially enjoying *The Great Movie Ride*, *Indian Jones Stunt Show*, and *Star Wars*. However, the shuttle bus never came to MGM that night, but when Jean phoned the dispatcher he insisted the bus actually did arrive

and pick up people, which was a blatant lie (although we did not know whether the bus driver or the dispatcher was the person lying). We were lucky to find the last cab leaving the parking lot, and he took us back to Comfort Inn for \$20.00 (which the morning bus driver had advised us was the legal maximum they could charge). Jean complained to the night manager of Comfort Inn since the hotel pays the shuttle buses for the service. She gave all three of us free hot buffet breakfasts and assured us she would complain to the bus company.

Andy stayed with us overnight, and had the buffet breakfast with us. Overall, he was pleased that we came to Disney World, and he was very chatty the entire weekend. He does not seem unhappy in Disney World, which is good since he is really a homebody who came home from college at least two weekends a month his entire four years. Living alone like this is good for him, and hopefully will teach him a few lessons about life that will stick with him afterwards.



November 2006

Thursday, Nov 2: My mother is doing very badly. Her wound (from radiation therapy 9 years ago) is not healing and there is considerably more overall deterioration, both physical and mental. The surgeon believes there is nothing more she can do for her and wants her moved to a hospice where she will basically be comfortable for as long as she has left.

Sunday, Nov 5: Friday I spent the morning at school observing 5 nontenured teachers, including two classes which had both a teacher and a Special Ed co-teacher working together. At noon I went to Dr. Valeri's for my regular physical. Apparently I am healthy.

Saturday morning I went to Qwest Labs for routine blood work, then Jean and I went to the

YMCA in the afternoon and to dinner at Rick & Barb's house. I spent most of today cleaning up the pile of mail on my desk, including medical bills of my mother's, preparing **VoP** to mail to FAPA, and grading 2 tests, as well as visit my mother, of course. I have been considerably stressed lately, which is not good since my back has been bothering me since we got back from Disney World.

Thursday, Nov 9: What an absolutely crazy week this has been! Monday night was *Target Teach*, so I got home about 9:15pm. Tuesday night we did marking period grades for *Target Teach*, so I got home about 7:15pm. Wednesday night my Indian Culture Club had a *diwali* dinner, which was actually a very nice event, but I got home at 10:15pm. About 60 people were

there, including club members and their families. It was run by my officers, Dipa, Akanksha, Kruti and Dhara. Everybody brought Indian food which was almost entirely carbohydrates—potato casseroles, rice, and thin bread—but it was all very tasty. At one point I was sitting by myself when four of my sophomores (Ruchi, Aisha, Foram, and Krishna) came over and chatted awhile because they said I looked lonely. That was definitely nice of them. And Foram’s mom forced me to take a huge platter of leftover potato casserole home. That was nice of her, but I’ll be eating potato all week.

Fortunately I have a four-day weekend without a lot of schoolwork, only a few tests and a Statistics activity to grade, so I am hoping to have time to catch up on my own work.

Today my mother had another vac unit replacement in her wound, after which both the infectious disease doctor and the surgeon told us that my mother’s necrotic tissue is spreading up her intestines and toward her bladder, and that she is beyond any possible healing at this point. She is rarely awake and hardly ever coherent. She never eats and is basically being kept alive by a feeding tube. Stephen and I agreed it is time to send her to a hospice and concentrate on making her comfortable rather than continue the futile efforts to make her heal. There is a bed available in the hospice at Dover Hospital, so that is where she will be transferred.

All the media in New Jersey is overly-excited about Rutgers University’s football team, so much so that football coverage is crowding election news off the front pages of the newspaper. This is the same Rutgers which early this year cut million of dollars from its budget, including nearly 100 faculty and staff positions, while raising the salary of its football coach to \$1 million, which is double the salary of the university president. Reportedly the university funnels \$5 million per year into football. Rutgers has been striving in recent years to become a major university, but its anti-education attitude in favor of big-time sports makes them a second tier university at best.

Saturday, Nov 11: Last night I bought C.J. Cherryh’s **Inheritor** at Barnes & Noble, then we went to yoga, which felt good. My back has been stiffer mornings than previously, so I have been increasing my back and abdomen strengthening exercises in the evening a bit.

Wednesday, Nov 15: My mother is still in the hospice. The stress this is placing on the entire family is incredible. We all thought it was bad when my father was in a coma a year ago, but at least then we had the hope he would come out of it. There is no such hope for my mother.

This morning while I was driving around the Netcong Circle, a car coming from Route 183 trying to cross Route 46 hit my car, sending me careening into another car. Fortunately, we were moving very slowly and the damage is all in the body of my car. I was able to drive it home but Jean and I believe I cannot drive it to school until it is repaired. Fortunately, Nancy drove up behind me, so she drove home with me, then took me to school. That was very nice of her. We arrived at school late at 8:15, but it could have been a lot worse than it was.

Thursday, Nov 16: My mother died this afternoon at 2:38pm. Stephen phoned David this morning at about 7:15am to tell him that the nurse warned him last night she was near the end and would probably die today. So David told the principal who encouraged us to leave. We put lesson plans together for two days, and I told a few people that I would likely be gone for three-to-four

days, then we left an hour later.

We were the first ones to arrive at the hospice, although Jean, Doreen, Mike & Johna came before she died. Stephen arrived shortly thereafter. Considering how much my mother has suffered recently, and the fact that there was absolutely no chance of her recovering at all, the end was actually a relief for her.

Friday, Nov 17: This morning my brothers, Doreen and I met at Cochran Funeral Home at 10:00am where we made arrangements for Sunday's viewing and Monday's funeral. Afterwards we went to the florist to order flowers, and then to Heath Village where we will have the luncheon following the funeral mass at Our Lady of the Mountain. That way all my mother's senior friends will be able to attend the luncheon since many of them cannot possibly get to the funeral mass.

When I was dressing in the morning, my back went out so that I could barely bend or even stand up straight all day. I went to the chiropractor in the afternoon—an appointment I had originally intended to cancel since I did not go to school. Her new partner worked out the knots in my back which really eased my pain and stiffness.

Because of my back I could not go to yoga last night. After we ate dinner with Mark who came home from TCNJ for the funeral, Jean dropped me off at Barnes & Noble while she went to yoga alone. I spent two hours browsing books, then walking through Ledgewood Mall where I visited several stores. It was a rather boring evening.

Saturday, Nov 18: Today my back is much better, which I attribute partly to the back and abdomen exercises I do every night.

This morning Jean and I drove to the airport to pick up Andy and Ceil, whose flights arrived almost simultaneously. We left home at 10:00am and were back by 12:30pm. When we got home we had two fruit baskets waiting, one from Drew's family and one which was brought by Kate. We also had a loaf of banana bread from two neighborhood friends. Tonight the entire family met at Stephen & Doreen's house for dinner, since we all needed to be together this weekend.

Monday, Nov 20: The past two days have been an emotional roller coaster ride of sharing memories of my mother, celebrating her wonderful life and personality, and mourning her death, which came way too soon after far too much suffering. The list of people who attended the viewing was heartwarming indeed, including my closest friends at PHS, Damaris and Maria, who took personal days to attend the funeral.

The funeral mass was both sad and touching. My mother's 6 grandsons were the pallbearers while her 4 granddaughters brought the gifts to the altar. Stephen and Michael did the readings, while Doreen, David and I gave the eulogies. Father Mark gave a very touching tribute as well. The luncheon afterwards at Heath Village was very nice, partly because my mother's senior friends were able to attend it.

At the luncheon I promised Aunt Chris, my cousin Ronnie, and Uncle Charley and his son Richard that we would keep in touch with them now that my mother can no longer do so. In the past it has

always been easy letting my mother stay in touch with everybody, but now that I am at least the nominal head of the family it has become my job to do it.

Overall, it still seems like a terrible nightmare that my mother is gone, and I suppose it will sink in eventually. The world is definitely a lesser place without her. Here is an edited version of my eulogy for her:

I'm here to talk briefly about the finest person I have ever known in my life.

My mother never, ever had a mean word for anybody. Somehow she always managed to see the good in everyone she knew. If one of us ever said something mean about somebody, she just rolled her eyes, shook her head, and said something good about them instead.

She was always caring for other people, not just emotionally, but physically. I will never forget all those years in Cliffside Park when she cared for her mother, my grandmother. I don't think I'm revealing a secret here by saying my grandmother was definitely not the easiest person to care for. But my mother did it, day in and day out, never complaining, never taking a minute away from caring for the rest of her family.

My mother cared for a lot of other people when we lived in Cliffside Park. She cared for my father when he had a difficult time in the late 50s. When my aunt got a slipped disk, she moved upstairs into my bed in the sunporch, right across the room from my grandmother, so that my mother cared for both of them for many weeks.

My memory of Sundays in Cliffside Park was my mother always having a food spread ready, whether coldcuts and bread or macaroni salad or potato salad, just in case anybody came to visit. And people always came, and my mother was at her happiest taking care of everybody, never seeming to notice how hard she was working. Or caring how hard she worked.

After her mother died, she continued to take care of her father and, of course, her four boys. Sometimes she took care of us even when we didn't want her to. When I was in college she always tried to sneak into my room to make my bed. I would tell her, "Mom, I am in college now! I didn't want you to make my bed anymore!" So instead she would go to the kitchen to try to make my lunch for me.

Kathy and I always remind each other that there were two people we both knew who every single person who knew them liked, her father and my mother. And there was a time in the 1970s when her family and my family merged into a single family. That was typical of my mother's whole attitude towards people, that what began as an incredibly-trying time for Kathy and Doreen's family because a positive, bonding experience for two families.

I think David will agree with me that he and I are much better teachers because of our mother's influence on us. It's hard not to care for your students as people when we have so many ingrained memories of our mother caring for everybody she knew as much as she did. If everybody would just be a bit more like she was, the world would be a much better place.

Wednesday, Nov 22: After only 1½ days back at school, I began a four-day Thanksgiving weekend at noon today. I still have work to do, both winding up some of my mother’s affairs and schoolwork, but I hope to have a bit of time for my own work this weekend as well.

Jean and Mark went to the Verizon store today and got new cell phones for the entire family, including one for me so now I am on the family plan instead of using the old Trac Phone.

Saturday, Nov 25: This morning my mother’s ashes were put into the monument beside my father at Good Shepard Cemetery. Father Mark from Our Lady of the Mountain was there. Afterwards 20 of us went to Stardust Diner for brunch, a bit of closure for the past two weeks.

Thursday was a very quiet Thanksgiving dinner with only the five of us. Friday was a very hectic day. Jean, Andy and I drove to the airport at 5:45am for his return flight to Florida. On the way back Jean and I stopped at Staples and Shop-Rite in Chester where we beat the early morning “Black Friday” crowd. We bought printer cartridges and mailing boxes at Staples, then Jean got the only digital camera with accessories kit available at Shop-Rite, even though it was their top advertised item for the weekend. After supper we went to BJ’s where Ceil bought sneakers.

Cast of Characters

Alan & Denise	our closest friends who were our neighbors when we lived in Hopatcong
Andy	our older son, a senior at East Stroudsburg University
Ceil	Jean’s 86-year old aunt who is the spryest senior I know!
David	my third brother who teaches math at PHS; his wife Karen, daughter Jillian
Drew	The boys’ best friend, our “third son”
Fei Fei	former student of mine, now a close family friend I refer to as my “daughter”
Jean	my wife
Kathy	Doreen’s sister, whose family lived with us briefly in the 1970s
Mark	our younger son, a senior at The College of NJ; his girlfriend Kate
Michael	my youngest brother, wife Johna, children Janel, Michelle and Jeffrey
Nancy	my carpool partner
Rick & Barb	our friends from when Jean and I taught at Paul VI High School; their son Chris
Silvio	Fei Fei’s husband
Stephen	my second brother, his wife Doreen, sons Chris, Kyle and Ryan

On the Lighter Side

Caution... the following people all vote!

A man bought a new fridge for his house. To get rid of his old fridge, he put it in his front yard and hung a sign on it saying "Free to good home. You want it, you take it". For three days the fridge sat there without even one person looking twice at it. The man eventually decided that people were too un-trusting of this deal since it looked too good to be true. So he changed the sign to read "Fridge for sale \$50". The next day someone stole it.

*

While looking at a house, my brother asked the real estate agent which direction was north because, he explained, he didn't want the sun waking him up every morning. She asked, "Does the sun rise in the north?" When my brother explained that the sun rises in the east, (and has for sometime), she shook her head and said, "Oh, I don't keep up with that stuff."

*

A woman worked in technical support for a 24/7 call center. One day she got a call from an individual who asked what hours the call center was open. She told him, "The number you dialed is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week." He responded, "Is that Eastern or Pacific time?" Wanting to end the call quickly, she said, "Uh, Pacific."

*

My colleague and I were eating our lunch in our cafeteria, when we overheard one of the administrative assistants talking about the sunburn she got on her weekend drive to the shore. She drove down in a convertible, but "didn't think she'd get sunburned because the car was moving."

*

A man keeps a lifesaving tool in her car designed to cut through a seat belt if he gets trapped. He keeps it in the trunk.

*

Two friends were on a beer run and noticed that the cases were discounted 10%. Since it was a big party, they bought 2 cases. The cashier multiplied 2 times 10% and gave them a 20% discount.

*

A man was hanging out with a friend when we saw a woman with a nose ring attached to an earring by a chain. The friend said, "Wouldn't the chain rip out every time she turned her head?" The other man explained that a person's nose and ear remain the same distance apart no matter which way the head is turned.

*

A woman could not find my luggage at the airport baggage area, so she went to the lost luggage office and told the man there that her bags never showed up. The man smiled and told her not to

worry because he was a trained professional and she was in good hands. "Now," he asked her, "has your plane arrived yet?"

There once were two Irishmen, named Shawn and Pat, who were the best of friends. During one particular night of revelry, the two agreed that when one passed on, the other would take and spill the contents of a bottle of fine, Irish whiskey over the grave of the fondly missed and recently dead friend.

And as fate would have it, Shawn was the first to pass. Pat, hearing of his friend's illness, came to visit his dear friend one last time.

"Shawn," said Pat, "Can you hear me?"

Faintly, Shawn replied, "Yes, Paddy, I can."

Bashfully, Pat started, "Do you remember our pact, Shawn?"

"Yes, I do Paddy," Shawn strained.

"And, you'll also remember that I was to pour the contents of a fine, old bottle of whiskey over your grave, which we have been saving for, going on 30 years now?" said Pat.

"Yes Paddy, I do," whispered Shawn.

"It's a very bottle now, you know," urged Pat.

"And what are you gettin' at Pat?" asked Shawn, briskly.

"Well Shawn, when I pour the whiskey over your grave, would ya mind if I filter it through my kidneys first?"

Happy New Year, everybody! If 2006 was good, then I hope 2007 will be even better. But if 2006 was a bad year, then hopefully 2007 will make up for it with joy and happiness.