

APRIL 2023

SHARING Hope THROUGH HARDSHIP

100 เรื่องเยี่ยม

Retreats & Getaways Share the Gospel All Over the World!

Nye has Down syndrome and lives in Thailand. He and his whole family heard the Good News of Jesus Christ at our International Family Retreat!

from the heart

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. **EPHESIANS 2:10**

uring our Central California Family Retreat, I decided to go watch the special needs moms who signed up for the painting class. I wheeled by each table, cheering them on as they worked with their brushes and acrylic paints. I felt a tug when I saw the beautiful things they were creating on canvas. The teacher spotted me and said, "Why don't you give it a try?!"

I felt a surge of excitement, but then realized I wouldn't be able to reach the table easel. That's when my friend Kathren piped up, "I'll be your easel! I'll hold the canvas for you so you can reach it with your brush!"

For years, chronic pain has prevented me from painting, but I couldn't resist. Kathren held the canvas close, and I started splashing blue colors and green paint to create a sky, mountains, and fields. Before long, my work was completed and was I excited! All the mothers were happy about their paintings, too.

We were like happy kids at play and most of us-me included-hadn't experienced that much fun in years. Playtime is a critical part of *Family Retreat*. It helps lighten the weight of disability and open weary hearts to the love of Jesus. Spirit-blessed moments of joy open burdened souls to the possibilities of hope (offering much-needed respite, too). And God will be working like this in needy families who attend our Retreats & Getaways this summer.

My adventure at *Family Retreat* reignited my desire to paint, and I am now carving out time at my art easel. The Joni and Friends team is also excited that I am painting again (they have even created a beautiful new scarf from one of my designs... check out the back page)!

So, join me in praying that our wonderful Savior will draw more heavyladen families who struggle with disability to his side. Ask God to refresh them through joy-filled worship and times of play... but best of all, through the preaching of God's Word!







Family Retreat gave these special needs moms real rest and recreation, and they got to use their creative gifts to bring much glory to God!

A God-Ordained Impact

66 Toni and Friends has a Godordained impact on our lives," says Judy, describing the experiences she and her son, David, have at Family Retreat. "From the daily stuff to the spiritual stuff and seeing the connection between the twoit's where we find hope as the anchor of our souls ... Hope not found in the conditions of our children or our circumstances, but in realizing we are all normal, and we all have something to give each other."

When David was 23 years old, he was in a near-fatal motorcycle accident. His motorcycle landed on his face, crushing it, and the accident broke all of his extremities, as well. It took 23 surgical procedures to restructure David's face and limbs. And with two-thirds of David's brain not receiving proper blood flow-including the part that controls his lungs—doctors told Judy that David shouldn't have even survived.

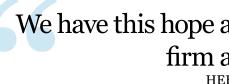
As if David's traumatic injury and resulting disability weren't difficult enough for Judy to navigate, her husband died from early onset Alzheimer's disease during the pandemic. In a season of great grief, Judy and David found Family Retreat.



"The experiences David has at *Family Retreat* are healing to his brain, forming new neuropathways and helping him heal from the trauma of the accident," says Judy. All throughout the week of *Family Retreat*, David shares the joy of the Lord with others through his now-famous fist bumps that he calls "knuckles."

"And to see David on a jet-ski this week that's the closest he can get to being on a motorcycle again. Feeling that wind in his





face... You didn't just make his day. You made his year!" says Judy. "Who knows this side of heaven what Joni and Friends has meant not only for David's physical healing, but also for his spiritual healing."

Your prayers and support make all our Christ-centered programs possible! Thank you for sending families struggling with disability and despair hope beyond their hardships!

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. HEBREWS 6:19

Family Retreat is

hen Nom was born, he didn't cry like other babies. "He was quiet," explains his mother, Ampan. That was her first indication that something was different about Nom.

"I am not ashamed of having a child with Down syndrome," says Ampan. "I take Nom shopping with me and introduce him to society. But in my neighborhood, people did not accept that."

Nom and his mother live in Thailand. In their society, people see children with disabilities as a burden. Ampan first became an advocate for her own son—showing the world that Nom is fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image.

And she has since become an advocate for other families living with disability, encouraging parents to bring their children out into the community in hopes that they will be accepted.

Yet while Ampan found great purpose in raising her son as a single mother, she was still missing the warmth of a larger family. That is, until she and Nom attended *Family Retreat* in Thailand.

"I have never been to any camp as good as this one!" says Ampan, enthusiastically. "Family Retreat is superb! It's a good opportunity for me to meet new friends, and Family Retreat makes Nom happy. It's exciting to see Nom making friends."



Ampan describes not only her own "Thank you for your kindness and experience at *Family Retreat*, but also the generosity to underprivileged children who experiences had by other special needs parents. would never have a chance to be in a place like "They are stressed out at home caring for their this," says Ampan in her personal message disabled children. Some come here crying and to Joni and Friends donors. "I wish you find support and encouragement. At *Family* prosperity and success!" Retreat, it feels like we're with family."

A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. PROVERBS 11:25



Just Like Amily

Nom shared his God-given gifts during our Family Retreat talent show. Thank you for giving people with disabilities a safe place to shine!

Volunteer With Us!

"I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' and I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" ISAIAH 6:8

Ready to answer God's call to serve at one of our life-changing events this year? Jesus will use you to completely transform the lives of people with disabilities and their families when you volunteer with:

- *Retreats & Getaways* that give families living with disability a place to find rest, hope, and their place in the body of Christ.
- Wheels for the World, providing the gifts of mobility, dignity, and the hope of the Gospel to children and adults with disabilities worldwide.
- *Joni's House,* a place where people living with disability find hope in Jesus, Christ-centered holistic care, and a valued role in their community.

There are many more ways you can volunteer with Joni and Friends, too. Go to **joniandfriends.org/volunteer** for a list of events in your area and change someone's life today! "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people, but it is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God." 2 CORINTHIANS 9:12

From Georgia >

On a Wheels for the World[™] outreach in Romania, a member of our Georgia team met seven-year-old Maria. Maria has profound disabilities; she doesn't have control of her limbs, requires a feeding tube and an aspirator, and is non-verbal.

Because of her disabilities, lack of mobility equipment, and the fact that her family lives in a remote area, Maria couldn't come to our wheelchair distribution site. Instead, our team traveled to Maria's house.

Before we met Maria, she rarely got out of bed or sat up, let alone left her house, as her family lacked the equipment and training needed to give her mobility. Maria's parents watched closely as we gently situated her in her new wheelchair. And after Maria got comfortable, sitting up on her own for the first time, her parents asked for prayer over their

daughter. Now, because of Joni and Friends and your love, Maria and her family have encountered the hands-on loving care of Christ.



From Arizona >

Shiv was born with cerebral palsy, a brain injury, and a seizure disorder. He is medically fragile and needs a feeding tube. Shiv's parents, Boopathy and Kavita, moved their family to Arizona from India eight years ago, leaving behind their extended family and support systems. During one of Shiv's hospital stays, Kavita learned about the Joni and Friends *Halftime Respite* program. Grateful for the opportunity for a much-needed break, Kavita signed up.

Shiv came to *Halftime Respite* with his eight-year-old brother Uday. He was thrilled for the chance to accompany Shiv and experience the fun, accepting Joni and Friends community.

Shiv's family now participates in *Halftime Respite* regularly, and attended their first *Family Retreat* where Shiv got to swim in a pool for the first time!

Kavita said, "we do not have any friends or family here in Arizona, we left everyone in India. But through Joni and Friends, we have many friends, we have people praying for us and it mean so much to our family." God has brought Shiv and his family into his house through Joni and Friends!



From Houston •

At three and a half, Lane got diagnosed with autism. At five he needed heart surgery. Deana, Lane's mom, has seen some members of their extended family and community struggle to fully embrace Lane. As Deana said, "The invitations don't come. It is just easier to leave us out." Libby, Lane's sister, has also noticed how people didn't accept her brother. She says, "It is hard to find friends who will embrace Lane as well."

When Lane's parents divorced in 2017, the family's isolation increased. During this lonely season Deana received an invitation to a Joni and Friends Texas *Family Retreat*—and a full scholarship for the family to attend! Arriving at *Family Retreat*, all fears about finding acceptance and belonging quickly faded, and turned into joy.



Throughout *Family Retreat*, Lane enjoyed paddleboarding, a costume dance, and many new friendships while Deana found refreshment amid Christ-centered community. Libby got to enjoy being a kid, not feeling responsible for her brother's wellbeing. Deana reflected that, "Joni and Friends allowed the hurts and challenges to be framed in a healthy context

and conversation."

Now, after multiple years attending *Family Retreat*, Deana has seen God bless both of her children. Over six summers, Libby has grown from a timid, reluctant sibling to an enthusiastic volunteer and inclusion advocate. And Lane has made it a personal mission to provide scholarships so other families living with disability can experience full acceptance and the love of Jesus at *Family Retreat*!

From New England >

Joanna and Alberto serve as missionaries in South Africa, focusing on prison ministry. They have four children. Their youngest, fifteen-year-old Phoebe, has Down syndrome, autism, and type 1 diabetes, and doesn't communicate verbally. Life with Phoebe brings her family great joy, and also comes with unique challenges. Phoebe has no awareness of danger and needs constant supervision. Her glucose levels are unpredictable, so her food intake must be carefully regulated.

Providing the constant care that Phoebe needs often proves exhausting for her parents. While on sabbatical in New England, Joanna and Alberto

learned about *Family Retreat*. Eager for respite, connection with other families navigating disability, and spiritual renewal, they signed up.

At *Family Retreat* Joanna and Alberto were stunned by the love their family received. Joanna greeted Phoebe's volunteer buddy with tears, marveling at her dedication and service. By the time *Family Retreat* ended, Joanna decided that she wants to serve at a Joni and Friends *International Family Retreat* one day, pouring God's love and encouragement into other missionary families living with disability.



From the San Francisco Bay Area •

At eight years old, Cathryn was diagnosed with Ataxia-Telangiectasia, a disease that acts like several other life-threatening conditions (cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, ALS, and AIDS) combined. Cathryn's experience has followed typical stages of the disease's progression: G-tube by age nine, wheelchair by ten, IV treatments by thirteen, and diabetes at twenty.

Cathryn's mom, Deanna, shares: "My faith in God was constantly tested by the daily care required of me, exorbitant medical expenses, fear of what lay ahead, and the orbiting grief over the loss of simple abilities and treasured dreams. And what about my other children and their needs. Where was God in my suffering?"

From Mississippi >

Amoree has autism, is non-verbal, and lives with a variety of medical challenges. Amoree's mother, Delasber, is a single mom who has experienced acute loneliness and grief, having lost multiple loved ones. They arrived at *Family Retreat* needing refreshment and love, and they were not disappointed!

At *Family Retreat* Delasber got the connection and refreshment she needed, as did Amoree! Amoree's volunteer buddy, Gail, took Amoree's medical needs and disability in stride and helped Amoree participate in every activity possible: canoeing, worship, Bible study, arts and crafts, and more. When Delasber saw a photo of her daughter enjoying a canoe ride safe in Gail's care, her eyes welled up. "The love of God was evident throughout *Family Retreat.*"



Family Retreat provided deep spiritual renewal for Delasber. "I was losing faith because I have lost so much. Being in a space where people understood those feelings and allowed me to express them made me begin to feel whole again."



Deanna would soon re-discover that God is ever faithful and close to the brokenhearted. When her family arrived at *Family Retreat* they were blown away by the sacrificial love of the volunteers and staff. They found comfort amid the "fellowship of sufferings" with like-minded believers who depend on Jesus daily and gained refreshment in the atmosphere of grace and acceptance extended to all regardless of their abilities.

Joni and Friends *Family Retreat* played a major role in helping Deanna come to a place of thanksgiving, peace, and genuine joy in the middle of navigating Cathryn's disability. Through Joni and Friends Cathryn and her family have also made lasting friends and no longer feel alone.

Honor a Loved One, Transform a Life

We gratefully acknowledge contributions given in memory or in honor of loved ones to further ministry in the disability community. To give a gift in memory of a loved one or in honor of a special occasion, visit joniandfriends.org/donate or contact Joni and Friends at 818.707.5664

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