

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP

Sixteen-year-old Brady loved meeting Joni and Ken at our Disability Awareness Day celebration. His parents Paluel and Julie wear their titles of Dad and Mom with pride! *Happy Father's Day to special needs dads everywhere!*



from the heart

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’

ISAIAH 52:7

When Ken and I take part in our *Family Retreats*, I smile whenever I see a child walking with the aid of leg braces and Canadian crutches. It always reminds me of my father who used a pair of similar crutches. All through his 70s and 80s Daddy hobbled around on them due to severe arthritis in his legs.

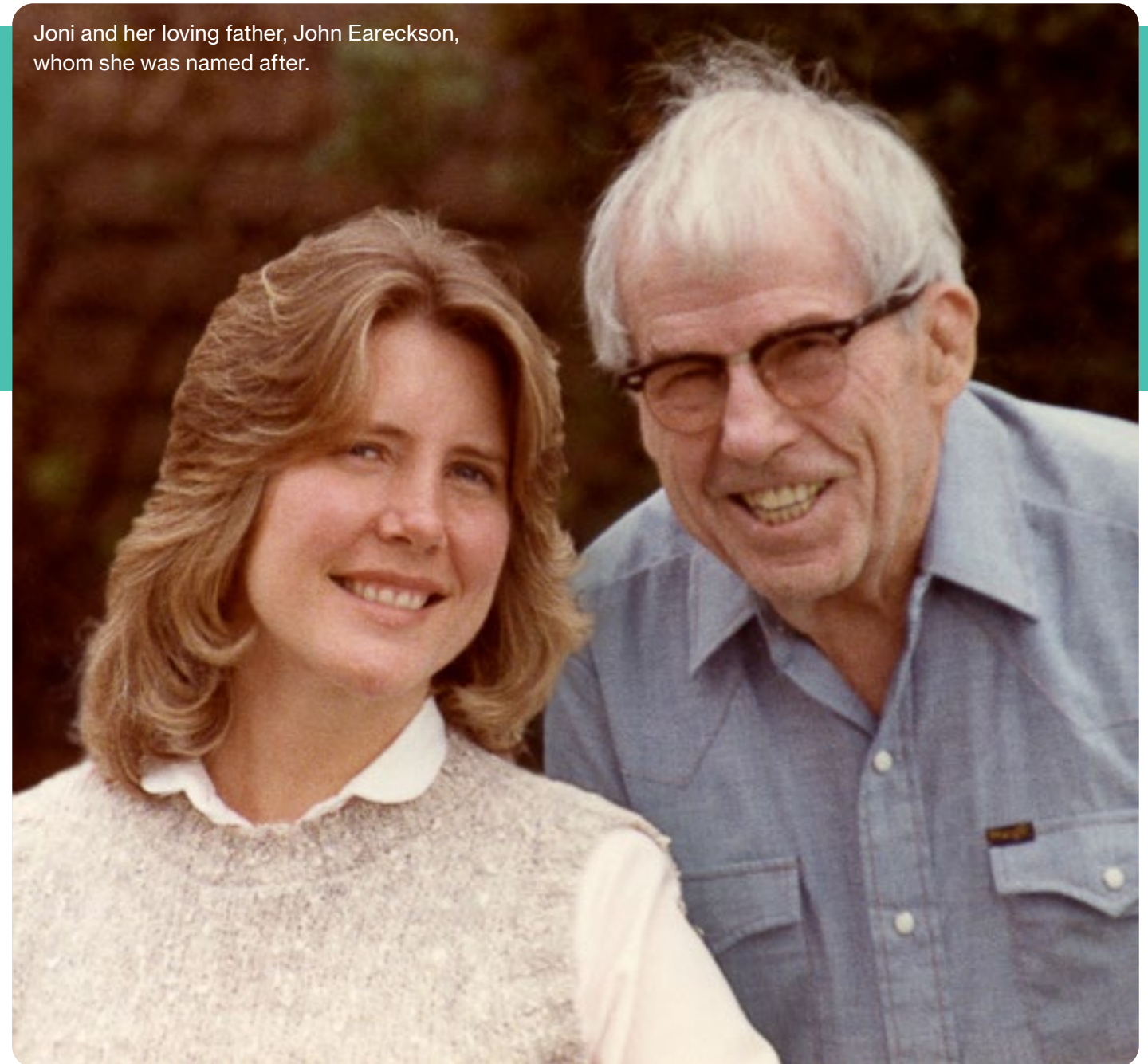
He used his crutches to push aside chairs or boxes, point at something in the sky, or even ring a doorbell. On a good day, he could hit a ball tossed to him by a grandkid. Around the farm we could always tell when he was on the tractor cutting hay in the field—his crutches would be leaning against the barn door.

When I was in the hospital after my diving accident, I could always tell when Daddy was arriving for a visit. I would hear the familiar “click-click” of his crutches echoing down the corridor. I’d think, *Oh boy, Daddy’s here!* More than anyone else in the family, I felt that he understood—he could truly empathize—with my pain and paralysis. His visits were *always* a blessing.

To this day, the click-click of crutches on a pavement or tiled floor is, for me, a welcomed sound. It’s a clarion call, announcing: *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!...* especially if those feet can only walk with crutches!

This summer, Ken and I will be heading to another Joni and Friends *Family Retreat* where we will see lots of adults and kids using wheelchairs and crutches. And when we’re in the dining hall, I just bet I’ll hear that familiar clicking sound on the floor. I’ll turn, see someone on crutches, and will smile and think of my dad. Given that Father’s Day is this month, I may even shed a tear.

Joni and her loving father, John Eareckson, whom she was named after.



Oh, how I wish Daddy were alive to see the beautiful feet of our Joni and Friends teams bringing the Good News to thousands of people at *Family Retreats* who use wheelchairs, communication devices, white canes, ventilators, electric scooters, walkers... and, yes, crutches.

So thank you, friend, for your prayers and gifts that make such *amazing* ministry possible. I’m so grateful to you for being on the Joni and Friends team “*who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings good tidings, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’*”

Onward and upward...

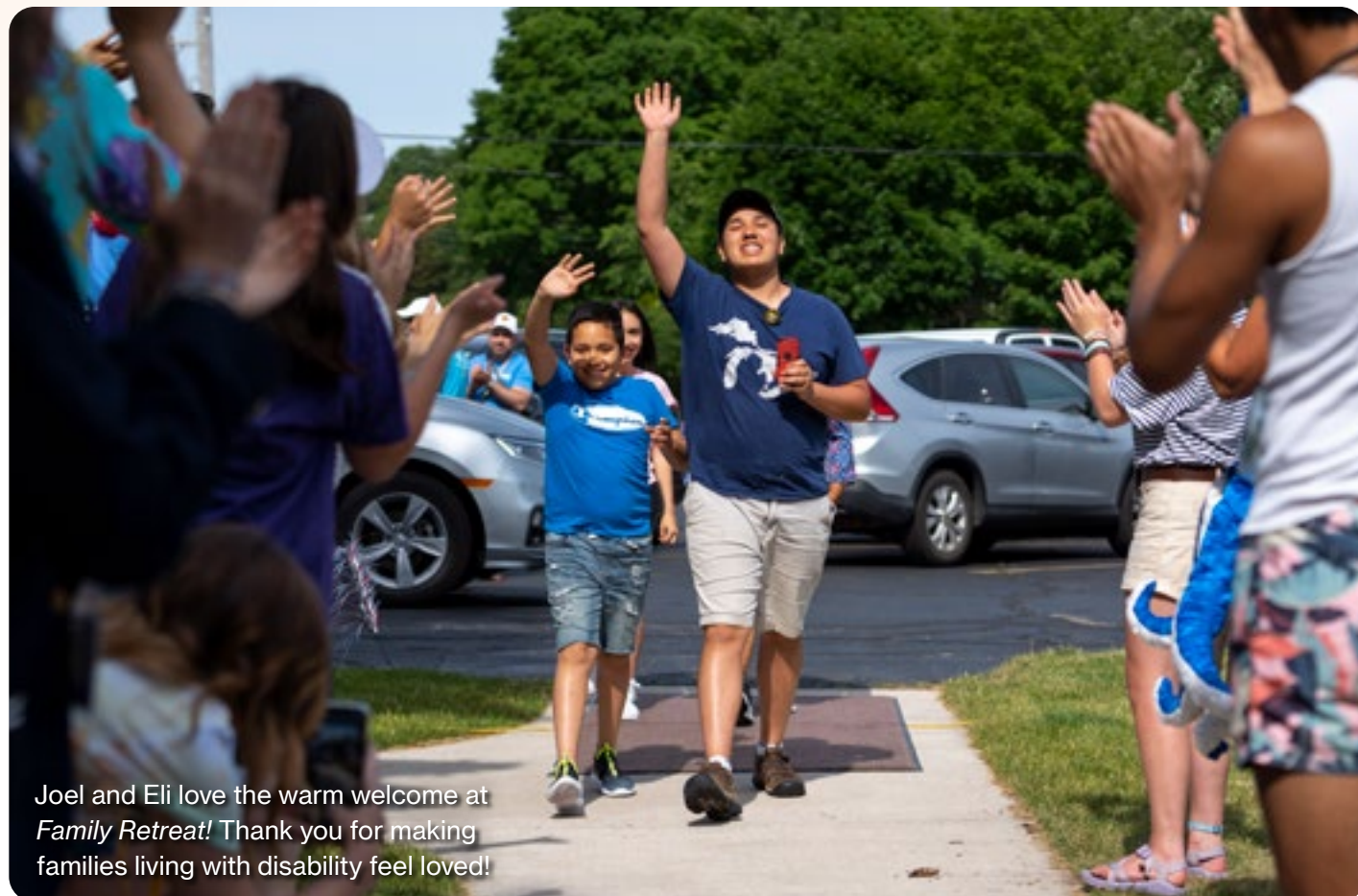
“Joni and Friends is an Injection of Faith, Hope, & Power!”

Don, his wife, Yolo, and their three children find faith, hope, and love at *Family Retreat*. Joel is 17 and has a language processing disorder, dyslexia, and a learning disability. Eli is 11 and has autism. Their sister, Daniela, is 15 and neurotypical. “For my family, *Family Retreat* is a place where we feel welcomed and loved for who we are,” says Daniela. “I started crying when we first arrived because I felt so loved and so happy for my brothers.”

Both Joel and Eli deal with social challenges.

“Joel doesn’t understand jokes or sarcasm,” explains Yolo. “Other teens find him socially awkward. He was being rejected at school, so we homeschooled him for a while. And Eli had a hard time making friends.”

But at *Family Retreat*, “I have fun and make friends!” shares Eli, excitedly. “Everybody cheers and claps for us when we get to *Family Retreat*. It makes me feel good and know that *Family Retreat* is about Jesus. I would be sad if there wasn’t *Family Retreat*.”



Joel and Eli love the warm welcome at *Family Retreat*! Thank you for making families living with disability feel loved!

“*Family Retreat* is my kind of place to be,” says Joel. “When I’m at *Family Retreat*, I have a buddy to talk to. *Family Retreat* is a life-changer to me because I hear about Jesus and what he has done for me.”

Family Retreat is a life-changer for Daniela, too. “Being the middle sibling of two brothers with disabilities can feel isolating, but at *Family Retreat* I don’t have to worry about taking care of my brothers. I get to be independent and just be me.”

“At *Family Retreat*, Daniela gets quality time with other siblings who deal with the

same things she does. They get rest and renewal because they’re caregivers, too,” says Don. “And the most important thing about *Family Retreat* is that it’s rooted in Christ. When we return home from *Family Retreat*, we take peace with us.”

“I see God in the hearts of all the volunteers,” says Yolo. “It’s a wonderful experience to actually see hope. *Family Retreat* offers families the healing process. Parents might come here angry about their circumstances, but at *Family Retreat* they learn that God doesn’t make mistakes.”



“Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.”
1 CORINTHIANS 13:13

Yolo’s message to you—our volunteers, prayer warriors, and donors—is heartfelt:
“What you’re doing is giving people hope. I’m so thankful for you and I pray for you. Gracias!”



Julissa and her volunteer buddy Malaika became fast friends at *Halftime Respite*! Go to joniandfriends.org to learn about our volunteer and internship opportunities today!

Halftime Respite is a Life Saver!

“As a parent of a child with special needs, it’s very hard to get a break—especially since we don’t have family living nearby,” says Lisa. That’s why programs like *Halftime Respite* are so important. Special needs moms and dads get a break from their daily caregiving demands while their children have fun in a safe, Christ-centered environment with trained Joni and Friends staff and volunteers.

Her husband, Jim, agrees. “It’s so difficult to find qualified caregivers who have the skillset needed to take care of children with disabilities,” he explains.

Their daughter, Julissa, is twelve years old and has cerebral palsy. Julissa is non-verbal and uses sign language to communicate. “It’s very difficult for Julissa to interact with others,” says Lisa. “When we go out into the community, I see judgement on other children’s faces. They just don’t know how to interact with Julissa. But here at *Halftime Respite*, we’ve found a place where Julissa can be herself without judgement.”

“*Halftime Respite* is just awesome!” says Jim. “Joni and Friends and all the volunteers are amazing. And we can see the joy on Julissa’s face when she’s here. It means the world to us that she’s happy, and we can go out on a date and spend time together as a couple while she has fun. I have a hard time trusting people, but now that we’ve found Joni and Friends, it makes all the difference.”

“This is a life-saver for our family!” says Lisa. *Halftime Respite* is strengthening families and strengthening faith! *Your prayers and support make this and all our Christ-centered outreaches possible! Thank you for your faithful partnership!*

Disability Awareness Day

with
KWAVE
 107.9^{FM}

We recently teamed up with KWAVE and Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa to host an exciting Disability Awareness Day, complete with a wheelchair collection drive, fun, fellowship, and an inspirational message from Joni. Hundreds of people gathered in support of families living with disabilities, and—best of all—hearts were touched by the Good News of Jesus!

People all over Southern California came out to donate wheelchairs and other mobility equipment in support of *Wheels for the World*™. Families like Elliot and his mom, here with Joni and Ken. Elliot came to donate his grandfather’s wheelchair. “He was very kind,” Elliot said, describing his grandfather, who moved to the United States from Vietnam over 60 years ago and has now gone on to be with the Lord. Joni and Ken prayed with Elliot and his mother, thanking God for the legacy Elliot’s grandfather left behind and blessing the person who will receive his wheelchair through an upcoming *Wheels for the World* distribution. “We brought his wheelchair today to help someone else now,” explained Elliot. *Donating a wheelchair today honors the memories of loved ones and transforms lives in the future!*



Countless families were reached with the love and hope of Jesus, like Robert and his friend, Tabetha, who have Down syndrome, here with Joni and Friends team member, Kimi. Tabetha was eager to share her *Family Retreat* praise report with us, saying that her favorite part of *Family Retreat* is “Everything!” and after hearing all about it from Tabetha, Robert can’t wait to attend *Family Retreat* himself. *Disability Awareness Day* was a heartwarming success thanks to our partnership with KWAVE radio, Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, and YOU!

Sharing Hope Around the Country and Around the World!

From Illinois ▶

Mark knows all about suffering. He lost his sister, adult daughter, and wife all within months of each other. So when he saw the daunting reports of war in Ukraine and realized how terribly it was impacting people with disabilities, he felt compelled reach out to the other side of the world with support, encouragement, and hope.

Working with Joni and Friends Illinois and Galyna, our International Regional Manager, Eastern Europe, Mark visited four Ukrainian refugee safe houses in Germany and three more in the Netherlands.

“I prayed, ‘God, give me the words to say,’” says Mark, who quickly discovered it was God’s plan for him to simply share his personal testimony about suffering, including the Bible verses he found most comforting and the way in which he is coping with the deaths of those closest to him.

Verses like Revelation 21:4-5 strengthened Mark as well as the Ukrainian refugees he met, reminding them that one day Jesus will wipe every tear from their eyes, for there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Hallelujah! Nearly everyone in his audiences had lost a neighbor or family member in the war. Three of the mothers he spoke with were war widows.

“I got to see how the Lord sustains people in the most difficult situations,” Mark says. “In turn, they looked at me and thought, ‘You should be a wreck.’ It made for strong, almost immediate connections.”

Mark knows God used him to deliver hope to Ukrainian refugees living with disability—yet he also received hope in his own hardships through his newfound relationships overseas. Displaced by war, grief-stricken by death, and struggling under the strain of disability... “Disabled Ukrainian refugees are an inspiration to me when I think about everything they’ve suffered in the past year.”

Jesus can use your testimony to encourage others, too—at *Family Retreat*, on a *Wheels for the World* outreach, or at a Joni and Friends respite event. God to joniandfriends.org/volunteer today and change someone’s life forever!

Mark and the Ukrainian refugees, like Andreana, inspired one another to find strength in Jesus.



From the Pacific Northwest ▼

“*Family Retreat* was like a blast of sunshine and love for the boys and for our family!” says Elizabeth, who attended *Family Retreat* with her three young adult children. Daniel and Matthew have a very rare form of limb-girdle congenital muscular dystrophy, resulting in physical and intellectual disabilities. Their sister, Emily, is neurotypical.

Daniel’s dream of riding on an inner tube came true at *Family Retreat*, as did his desire to ride a horse—something his family thought was impossible due to his severe scoliosis. But our Northwest team made sure Daniel was safe and secure in these and all the activities at *Family Retreat*.

Matthew’s volunteer buddies successfully maneuvered around his mood changes to help him stay safe and enjoy every aspect of *Family Retreat*, too. “We have been greatly blessed as a family by *Family Retreat*,” says Elizabeth. “It felt like heaven on earth with so much love for us and for my sons with disabilities. Thank you for bringing the kingdom of God to so many families, including ours!”



Family Retreat makes impossible dreams possible.

From Pennsylvania ▼

“Everyone is made in the image of God, and no one has less value than another,” said one Valley Forge Baptist Academy student after her experience with Joni and Friends Pennsylvania. “We should see people who have a disability the same way we see other people,” said another.

These middle school students and their classmates were deeply touched through their volunteer service with Joni and Friends. What started with a wheelchair collection drive turned into hearts changed and eyes opened. And after hearing more about Joni and Friends in their school’s chapel time, students, parents, and Valley Forge Baptist Academy staff members created Happy Grams for our five Pennsylvania *Retreats & Getaways*—delivering handwritten encouragement to hundreds of families living with disabilities.



Volunteer opportunities are endless and always life-changing! Pray about how you can get involved today!

“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

JOHN 16:33

From Missouri ▶

Quinn and Mariah were ushered into the world of disability with their baby's first grand mal seizure, with many more following. Malakai's seizures, coupled with his developmental delay, set Quinn and Mariah on the road of worry, testing, and unexpected results. Malakai was diagnosed with epilepsy at four months old and autism spectrum disorder on his second birthday.

"Finding out that Malakai had special needs was not something we planned for. We've had times of grief, especially when he was younger and we were first accepting his diagnosis," explains Mariah. "It put us in a tough spot financially. Quinn stayed home full-time to get Malakai to all his therapy and doctor appointments."

Connecting with others socially and relationally became difficult too. "With Malakai's seizures and behaviors, we mainly stayed home and isolated ourselves." As their children grew, Quinn and Mariah did their best to ensure their daughter, Kaiah, was able to enjoy as many typical experiences as she could, but even that was challenging. Malakai's disability made it difficult to experience things as a family. "We found ourselves venturing out some, but it was easier to divide and conquer in order to get our daughter to participate in birthday parties, events, etc."

Family Retreat is tailor-made for families like Quinn and Mariah's. Kaiah says, "At *Family Retreat*, we don't worry about getting embarrassed." While the world of disability is not easy, *Family Retreat* allows Quinn and Mariah to reconnect as a couple while their children are well cared for and loved by our faithful volunteers. "Jesus proves that he is there," says Kaiah



Thank you for showing special needs families the never-ending love of Jesus!

From Ohio ▶

Jim's motto is, "Share Jesus!" And that is exactly what he does as a long-time, faithful volunteer with our Ohio Area Ministry. Over the past 25 years Jim has served on eleven *Wheels for the World* outreaches, and he's already signed up for two more this year!

In addition to *Wheels for the World*, Jim has been a crucial part of 36 *Family Retreats* to date. That's right!... 36! He shines as a one-on-one buddy to teenagers and adults with disabilities, and he shines a spotlight on Jesus in everything he does. Jim explains, "I went to *Family Retreat* expecting to give, but I've received so much more than I've given!"

That's the way God works! When you volunteer through *Family Retreat*, *Wheels for the World*, or any of our other Christ-centered programs, Jesus will transform lives through you, and he'll transform your life in the process. Go to joniandfriends.org/volunteer for a list of events in your area!



Jim served his buddy Marcel with joy and found God's joy in his service!

From Dallas ▼

As a teenager, Sophie's priorities revolved around volleyball and fashion, but she was drawn to the young adults in the special needs class at her church. "They were beautiful," remembers Sophie. "I knew their happiness was from God." And when Sophie volunteered at *Family Retreat*, she discovered purpose, direction, and hope.

Sophie was paired with three-year-old Gideon, who is blind, deaf, and battles other significant medical issues. While Sophie describes her relationship with the Lord as childlike before she met Gideon, she learned to depend on Jesus for his strength and endurance in new ways as she cared for her young friend. Throughout *Family Retreat*, Sophie loved little Gideon, and her faith in Christ matured.

"Because of Gideon, I met our true God," says Sophie. "Not just the God that cured the blind, but the God who used the blind to reach those who have vision but cannot see. The God who reaches not only those who hold up their hands in church, but those who cannot lift up their hands on their own."

Sophie clung to these spiritual lessons long after *Family Retreat* was over, especially when her own health

issues altered the trajectory of her life. Initially Sophie was devastated when she was diagnosed with postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome. "I couldn't even hear myself think," she recalls. "All my thoughts were drowned out by the 'sounds' of the pain in my body. But without my pain, I wouldn't have grasped Gideon's story on even the smallest scale. Without Gideon, I would have viewed my pain on too large of a scale. Without my pain, I wouldn't feel so blessed to simply be standing on my own feet, and I certainly wouldn't thank the One who placed me on them."

"With each step forward, I have discovered purpose in showing others that life is hard, but the hardest part is realizing that the words 'pain' and 'life' can be interchangeable, and it is up to us to decide which one we will pursue," says Sophie. She and her family continue to volunteer—and find purpose—at *Family Retreat*.

God will strengthen your faith when you step out and volunteer with Joni and Friends, too! Go to joniandfriends.org/volunteer for more information today!



Sophie and Gideon experienced the power of God together at *Family Retreat*!

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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