

# SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP

Ryan is nine years old and has autism. He and his dad, Paul—an Air Force Veteran—thrive at *Warrior Getaway*, where their family gets closer to each other and closer still to Christ!



*Retreats & Getaways*  
provide much-needed  
respite & lasting hope in Jesus!



# from the heart

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.”

1 PETER 4:10

For anyone who has taken Ken's place as my caregiver for, say, a couple of weeks while my husband goes fishing, they get a crash course on the demands of helping someone with a disability. Right away, my helper gets immersed in countless routines: catheters, leg bags, disinfecting urological equipment, and picking up meds from the pharmacy. They help me with chest percussion therapy, spirometer readings, and they have to blow my nose at least ten times a day. There are bed baths and nebulizers, and that's just scratching the surface. And after Ken comes home from fishing, these friends marvel and say, “People have no idea what you and Ken go through. They are clueless.”

And they're right. People assume I just wake up and, here I am, all dressed with makeup on! And that's my point. People assume that families living with disability have everything covered. It's manageable, doable, reasonable... right?

Wrong! One individual, such as my husband, simply cannot do “it all,” day after day after day, week in and week out. And it's not just Ken and me. It's

every family dealing with disability. Many parents who come to our *Family Retreats* are raising children with significant developmental delays. These boys and girls must be tube fed and toileted. Other children have autism; some with sleep disorders. Moms and dads—many who are single parents—need respite.

The dictionary describes respite as “an interval of relief.” But it takes others who care enough to come in and provide that relief. It could be a neighbor who offers to learn a child's routine, or a Bible study friend, or a relative who can sit with an elderly family member and play checkers—anything constructive while caregivers take a much-needed break. Recently I lost the use of my right arm with which I feed myself. So, two evenings a week, my neighbor Kristen comes over and feeds me while Ken enjoys his dinner. It doesn't cost much time or effort, but who can place a value on that act of Christian kindness?! And when we say grace over our meal, we always bless the hands of Kristen who serves us. And, oh, do these respite providers deserve a blessing!



Caregivers like my wonderful husband, Ken, aren't just the hands and feet of Christ—they're my hands and feet, too! Here Ken holds my Bible so we can read it together!

The need is great. Millions more respite workers are needed. It's why I'm so excited that Joni and Friends offers a wonderful program to provide relief for families.

*Respite at Home* is a university-affiliated internship opportunity here at Joni and Friends which provides rest, hope, friendship, and encouragement to disabled children and their families. Participating students in select universities gain practical experience and insight into the unique joys and challenges experienced by families struggling with disability as they serve on a regular basis over the course of a semester. So, if you know a college student who might be interested, tell them to visit [joniandfriends.org](http://joniandfriends.org) for more details.

Finally, look for ways that you can help families that need a break. Begin by simply asking if there is some practical way you can assist. Assure the family that you don't mind being instructed in the

basics. Romans 12:11 says, “Be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.” Yes, you are serving the Lord Jesus when you provide help to a family that struggles with disability. So, please, remember the millions of families that need help... and learn how you can help them. For as you do, you will be serving the Lord Jesus.

P.S. April is National Autism Acceptance Month. Please pray for children with autism, and offer their parents the respite they need!



From  
POST-TRAUMATIC  
STRESS  
to  
POST-TRAUMATIC  
*Growth*

“Truly he is my rock and my salvation;  
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.”

PSALM 62:6

“Families are excited for their Warrior to come home, but when he or she does, they find them to be more distant, separated, and more isolated. It’s a big adjustment for the whole family,” explains Cedric. He and his wife, Michelle, have experienced this personally. Cedric is a Navy Veteran who served our country for six years as a gunner’s mate and missile technician on the USS Arkansas. His military service included three deployments.

“Add Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to the dynamic and the Warrior starts to have images—they feel regret, shame, even guilt over things they had to do on mission. It goes against their moral fabric,” says Cedric. He and Michelle now serve as counselors at our *Warrior Getaways*.

Michelle explains, “Joni and Friends serves our Warriors who don’t know where else to go, and *Warrior Getaway* is for the entire family.”

“Our goal is to help Veterans move from post-traumatic stress to post-traumatic growth,” says Cedric. “And we’re giving them the tools to do so.”

“Not to mention all the boating, arts and crafts, horseback riding, archery, and fishing!” adds Michelle. “And *Warrior Getaway* is founded in Christ, which is so important because Jesus Christ is literally the Answer. Jesus is the firm foundation that healing is built upon.”



Cedric is not only a Veteran—he and his wife, Michelle, serve as therapists at *Warrior Getaway*. “It’s our opportunity to give back,” says Cedric.

“Let me just say that personally, as a Veteran, I’ve seen both sides,” says Cedric. “The side of the participant and the side of the facilitator here at *Warrior Getaway*. I’ve witnessed the changing of lives here, and it’s because of all the love. *Warrior Getaway* gives Veterans an opportunity to process their experiences in a very safe environment.”

“And the Veteran’s children are cared for so the adults can concentrate on their healing without worrying about their kids,” says Michelle. Our Veterans—and their families—have made such great sacrifices to serve our country and protect our freedoms. And as a result, many come home with visible and invisible disabilities. But at *Warrior Getaway*, every member of the family finds help, hope, and healing in Christ.



# WARRIOR GETAWAY

## Changed our Lives!

“I pray that you... may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

EPHESIANS 3:17, 19

“Soldiers go to war. But the whole family deals with the aftermath of war,” says Brittany. “And *Warrior Getaway* helps our family become stronger as a unit.”

Brittany’s husband, Edward, protected our country as a Marine for fourteen years. He then re-enlisted in the military—this time in the Army. Throughout Edward’s career, he was deployed seven times including tours of duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. He is a Desert Storm Veteran who explains matter-of-factly, “War is a different world altogether.”

Edward now lives with a spinal cord injury and a traumatic brain injury, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder, high anxiety, and almost no short-term memory. His brain injury impacts his balance, requiring the use of a cane. And his PTSD manifests itself through flashbacks, fear, and anger.

“*Warrior Getaway* gives me comfort. When I talk to the other Veterans, I see that we have so many things in common,” says Edward. “When we come to *Warrior Getaway* we take part in activities that help us grow, get stronger, and move forward. And it’s because of Christ that we are all here.”

“I’ve seen Veterans come to know Jesus and even get baptized at *Warrior Getaway*,” says Edward. “I feel uplifted and filled with the Holy Spirit here.”

“Edward doesn’t sleep well. He is restless and has nightmares,” says Brittany. “And his anxiety has worn off on me, for sure. But Joni and Friends has definitely helped Edward manage his PTSD. Coming to *Warrior Getaway* gives Edward camaraderie with his fellow Veterans. We can’t find this type of support with any other organizations. *Warrior Getaway* has helped us 100%.”



“The whole family needs *Warrior Getaway*,” says Brittany. “And we are so grateful to the donors who make *Warrior Getaway* possible. Without you, we would not be here. Your generosity and prayers make the difference!”



## HONORING OUR VETERANS & THEIR FAMILIES AT *WARRIOR GETAWAY* & ALL YEAR LONG!



"*Warrior Getaway* brought my husband and me closer and gave us an opportunity to take one more step closer to being where we need to be," says Amy. Her husband, Chet, served our country and protected our freedoms in the Navy.



"The most valuable part of *Warrior Getaway* was just being able to relax and hang out with other families. We were able to bond and share similar experiences with other couples," says Justin, a Marine Veteran.



"*Warrior Getaway* allowed me to bond and be more open with my wife, Erica. I loved watching her enjoy herself with all the new experiences," says Joe, an Army Veteran.



"My daughter and I got a chance to walk around the camp together and just laugh and play. We took pictures together and enjoyed the fresh outdoors. It was just a great experience to have with her. I could see how happy she was!" says Justin (shown here with his wife, Susan, and daughter, Kimber).



# Bringing People with Disabilities into the Body of Christ

## From Arizona ▼

"I don't know where our family would be without Joni and Friends. I am very thankful that God has used Joni and Friends to bring me closer to God and to experience life with others who live with a disability," says twelve-year-old Enoch, who has autism and communicates through assistive technology.

*Family Retreat* has impacted Enoch and his whole family in remarkable ways. As Enoch himself explains, *Family Retreat* is "heaven on earth for those of us living with a disability. Our suffering is alleviated for a little while, and here the glory of God is revealed."

Enoch loves to run. He's going non-stop for most of the day! So much so that his *Family Retreat* volunteer buddy averages 23,000 steps each day with Enoch. "Not only is my buddy serving me," says Enoch. "He's also serving our Most High God!"

But *Family Retreat* isn't just a time for Enoch and his buddy to run. It's also a very special opportunity for Enoch to explore his love of nature. Hiking, swimming, and zip-lining help Enoch feel the love of Jesus while safely experiencing the great outdoors. At *Family Retreat*, Enoch's parents don't need to worry about him or his siblings. They know their children are well cared for and supervised. And as a result, each family member is able to draw closer to the Lord.

Joni and Friends has become such an integral part of Enoch's family that they refer to our ministry as "Joni and Family." Thank you for your ongoing support that allows us to minister to families like Enoch's. You give families struggling with disability the gift of feeling loved. And you show people with autism that they are dearly valued, not just during Autism Acceptance Month in April, but all year long!



Elijah, Erica, Emmitt (on Erica's lap), Jarod, Ean (on Jarod's lap), and Enoch experience God's goodness at *Family Retreat*.

## From Texas ▼

Tragedy struck without warning when thirty-two years ago, during a typical Sunday morning at church, a malfunctioning playground swing set left three-year-old Jennifer with quadriplegia. The emergency room doctor said it was the worst broken neck he had ever seen! Jennifer wasn't breathing on her own and her mom, Anne, began to mentally prepare for her little girl's funeral. But God had another plan. Jennifer not only survived... she grew into a powerhouse young woman with gifts, talents, and a purpose-driven life that inspires and motivates everyone around her!

In the beginning, one medical crisis after another plagued young Jennifer's broken body for months: a spinal fusion that required a body cast, the inability to talk due to a ventilator, fevers, pneumonia, and urinary tract infections. Through it all, Anne says that Jennifer "just kept smiling."

Five months after her accident, Jennifer's family was reunited when she returned home and they began adjusting to their "new normal" life, including home schooling for Jennifer. She thrived because she loved to learn, and Anne knew Jennifer would flourish in an actual school setting among her peers. Resistance from the special education teacher because of Jennifer's noisy ventilator and her unique challenges motivated Anne to press on and persist until, along with a personal nurse, attending class became a reality.

After an unexpected divorce, Anne became a single mom of three young children, adding to the daily burden she already shouldered. Just when she was close to her breaking point, Anne heard Joni talking about *Family Retreat* on her car radio. She immediately pulled over, called our Texas office, and signed up!

At *Family Retreat*, God met Anne's intense need for respite and connection. And while friends were not plentiful for Jennifer, she was surrounded by new friends who truly valued her. Now, twenty years later, Jennifer and her family serve as a strong witness to the transformative power of a Christ-focused community that embraces, encourages, and nurtures families grappling with the daily strain of disability. Today they serve as a light to other families who are crying out for friendship and hope!



Jennifer, here with her mom, Anne, uses a device called a HeadMouse which translates the movements of her chin and allows her to create beautiful and unique works of art like this dolphin mosaic.



## From Mississippi ▼

“Joni and Friends allows us to breathe, rest, and find peace,” says Dawn. “This is a community that provides a sense of belonging and support, which in turn allows us to support and serve others.”

Dawn and Ben love bringing their children, Alexa Anne and Elijah, to *Family Retreat*. Nine-year-old Elijah has autism and thoroughly enjoys the relationships he forms each year at *Family Retreat*. He can often be spotted wrapped in his favorite blanket with his volunteer buddy close by his side. He enjoys the individualized attention he receives, the activities adapted to his special needs, the sensory stimulation of being outside, and the familiar faces greeting him with big smiles and hearts full of love. Alexa Anne is twelve years old and enjoys the fellowship she has with other siblings, as well as the chance to serve in different ways throughout the week.

Elijah and his family have truly become part of our Joni and Friends family. In addition to *Family Retreat*, they

shine at the Barnyard Dance, receive special delivery gifts during the Christmas season, attend our various community dinners, and volunteer at our Mississippi office.

God has even used Elijah and his family to be a catalyst within their own local church. Elijah now has a buddy who guides him through both the Sunday morning service and Sunday school each week. Dawn and Ben are excellent advocates for their own family and other families living with disability within their congregation. And this year, they're seeking to recruit more volunteers for *Family Retreat* from their church!

*Family Retreat* and all of our Christ-centered programs provide special needs families with a time of rest, fellowship, and biblical encouragement so they can return to their own church community refreshed and rejuvenated. Your prayers and support are helping families struggling with disability find their place in the body of Christ!



At Joni and Friends, we celebrate children with autism—like Elijah—not just during Autism Acceptance Month, but every day of the year!

## From New England ▼

When Jackson was born with Down syndrome 15 years ago, his mom, Suzannah, knew he was a gift from God. However, as Jackson grew and the unique joys and challenges that life with disability bring became more apparent, struggles developed for this newly single mom of five sons. To those on the outside, Jackson is “Mr. Social,” the fun center of attention and giver of the best hugs. Still, his need for 24/7 care, support, and attention can be exhausting for Suzannah.

It wasn't until thirteen years later, after their first *Family Retreat*, that Suzannah felt she could truly exhale. The whole week was transformational for her as a mom raising a child with disability. Suzannah says, “I had always known about Joni, but never thought about attending *Family Retreat* until a friend encouraged us to go. I have a hard time thinking about doing something for myself and acknowledging that I also need care. My foot is always on the gas, just trying to move forward. I learned that *Family Retreat* is about more than getting to press the brake for a moment—it's about getting out of the car and letting someone else drive it.”

Volunteers like Jackson's one-on-one buddy serving as the hands and feet of Jesus at *Family Retreat* are the ones Suzannah trusted with the steering wheel. “The fanfare and celebration as we pulled into *Family Retreat* surprised me. Jackson obviously loved it, but I had no idea how much I would,” says Suzannah. Jackson hit it off with his buddy instantly, and Suzannah felt instant relief from the weight of caregiving on her shoulders.

Suzannah didn't need to worry if Jackson would say the wrong thing or bother the wrong person. She watched in awe as he got to fully be who God created him to be—celebrated in every way.

“Jackson lives for *Family Retreat*. He makes friends wherever he goes but is not always accepted,” says Suzannah. “*Family Retreat* is an environment of total acceptance. Jackson usually flocks to his adult care givers, but at *Family Retreat*, he builds peer relationships with his teen volunteers and becomes ‘one of the boys.’”

Your love and prayers are bringing families like Suzannah and Jackson's closer to Christ! Thank you for your faithfulness and steadfast support!



Jackson, Traci (our beloved volunteer), and Suzannah celebrate the goodness of God at *Family Retreat*!



# Bless Your Loved Ones & Share the Love of Jesus!

When you give a gift in honor of your loved ones, you share the gift of the Gospel with people living with disabilities worldwide! To make a contribution in memory or in honor of someone special—or to acknowledge a special occasion—visit [joniandfriends.org/donate](http://joniandfriends.org/donate) or call us at **818.707.5664** today!

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## April is National Volunteer Month!

You can make an immediate and eternal impact in the lives of people living with disability when you volunteer with us. Just ask Rose! She's volunteered on 35 *Wheels for the World™* outreaches—spreading the Gospel and sharing the love of Jesus everywhere she goes!

Visit [joniandfriends.org/volunteer](http://joniandfriends.org/volunteer) and learn how you can make a difference today!



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