

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP



Lydia and her volunteer buddy had a blast this summer at *Family Retreat!*
Lydia's mother, Beckey, has a message for you!...

**“Come to *Family Retreat!*
You’ll find a home here.
You’ll find your people and
a place to belong.”**

from the heart

“I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”

ISAIAH 46:4B

My chronic pain makes my quadriplegia feel like a walk in the park.

People often ask how I manage my pain. Well, when its fangs sink deep into my hips and back, that's my signal. I begin deep breathing, slow and steady. And when fiery pain threatens to overtake me—just as the flames threatened to consume Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in that fiery furnace found in the book of Daniel—I have a conversation with it.

I don't say, “I can't stand this; it's killing me,” because words like that are fraught with anxiety. Fear only makes things worse. Instead, I calmly ask Jesus to meet me in my pain, to not let it crush me. And the Son of God never fails to meet me, just as he met those three Hebrews in that hot furnace of fire.

And what does Jesus say to me in that agonizing place? He comforts me with his own words. He will say something like, “Joni, my Spirit inspired 2 Corinthians 4:8 for a good reason. For although you 'are hard pressed on every side,' you will not be crushed.”

Oh, what a promise! Pain may tighten its vise grip, but it cannot crush me. As I cling to Christ's promises, my pain pushes me further into his heart. There's nothing sweeter than finding my Savior in the middle of my hellish circumstances. It helps deflect the pain and helps me to suffer well. Jesus helps me be in that unhappy place well.

All the years I lived in my wheelchair, I never got delivered from pain. But I met my Deliverer in it. I didn't get healed, but I found intimate fellowship with the Healer.

Friend, pain does not have to crush you. As you courageously look at the stern countenance of pain and enter unafraid into its recesses, you will defang it of its terror. You'll see that the Lord is in your pain, having transfigured it to become a place of union with him. Jesus conquered the insidious ways of pain and because of that, he's your prescription for pain—whether it's in your hip, your head, or your heart.

And remember, there is a Day coming when “He will wipe every tear from your eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4). Until then, when pain encroaches, start deep breathing and cling to a Bible promise. There are thousands to hold onto. Perhaps my favorite is this one uttered by Almighty God to you and me, promising, “I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (Isaiah 46:4b).

And he will. He promised.



“We Love the Vision of Joni and Friends!”

“Joni and Friends helps me give myself grace,” says Becky. She and her husband, Nathan, drive nine hours to get to *Family Retreat*. That’s how important this week-long slice of heaven is to them and their five children.

“Outside of Joni and Friends, people don’t think to reach out to typical siblings,” Becky explains. “But at *Family Retreat*, everyone is celebrated. Our three older children—Jeremiah (19), Josiah (16), and Naomi (13)—love serving here. They get a new perspective at *Family Retreat*. They go through volunteer buddy training, and then when we’re home, they ask me if I need help with their younger siblings!”

And that help is much appreciated. Becky and Nathan’s two youngest children, Caleb (12) and Lydia (9), both have Down syndrome. “A lot of my time and energy goes into my youngest two,” says Becky. “The other kids don’t always get the attention they need. I was praying, ‘God, I need help! I need *something!*’ And he answered through *Family Retreat*.”

“While Caleb is more content and relaxed, Lydia has a big personality,” says Becky with a smile. “She loves people, and in everyday life I never know how others will react to her. At home, I don’t always have the energy to keep Lydia reined in. But here I don’t need to worry about it! Both Caleb and Lydia—and our whole family—are fully embraced.”



Jesus ministers to every member of the family at *Family Retreat!*

Becky continues, “I really appreciate being able to connect with other moms who get it. It’s so hard to find those connections outside of *Family Retreat*. And here, Nathan and I get time together as a couple without interruptions. We just love the vision of Joni and Friends!”

No wonder Nathan and Becky are

willing to travel so far to attend our Oregon *Family Retreat*. In fact, they have been critical in developing our new *Family Retreat* in Idaho! “Families in our state need this!” says Becky.

When thinking about other families struggling with disability, Becky says, “Come to *Family Retreat!* You’ll find a home here. You’ll find your people and a place to belong.”



Everybody loved the service dogs who came to *Family Retreat* to share their love and emotional support, and Lydia was no exception!

“On my hard days I listen to Joni on the radio. I know she’s going through hard things too, but she keeps pointing me—and pointing our hearts—to Jesus. Joni teaches me to take all my pain and surrender it to God.” — Becky

Joni and Friends envisions a world where every person with a disability finds hope, dignity, and their place in the body of Christ.

Mourn with Those who Mourn, Rejoice with Those who Rejoice

“We spend a lot of our life hearing everything that’s wrong with Sophia,” says Anna. “At *Family Retreat*, we get to focus on what’s right.”

Sophia is twelve years old and has a rare metabolic deficiency. She is non-verbal and has a lot of physical disabilities. Just in the past year, Sophia has learned how to walk independently with a walker.

Anna recalls the beginning of life with Sophia. “She was blind at birth. I called out to God, ‘Give her vision, or give me vision!’” Miraculously, the Lord answered both parts of Anna’s prayer. Sophia can see, and Anna now sees beyond disability.

“I’m still reconciling with disability,” confesses Anna. “Some days I stop and wonder, *Is this really our story?* But I can see that Sophia is a catalyst opening our eyes, hearts, and minds to who God is outside of our preconceived notions.”

“Our family showed up at our first *Family Retreat* three years ago with a major chip on our shoulders,” admits Anna. “We were a wreck. Honestly, I was in a bad mood for no less than 80% of the week. Sophia loved it—riding horses, listening to music, and all the attention from her buddy—but not me. My husband, David, and I waffled between tears, anger, and embarrassment most of the time. I really didn’t want anyone to look at me, let alone talk to me. I was at one of those especially rough patches in my own process of frustration about disabilities, tension with my husband, and fear over the unexpected turns of our life.”

Anna continues, “Yet in the surprising ways of God, I am now the co-leader of our women’s small group at *Family Retreat*. My nervousness and anger have turned into an eagerness to see what God has for each of the families here. God invites us to mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice. That’s what I look forward to doing with the women at retreat each year.”

“Disability is very, very painful and hard. It doesn’t feel good. It can feel like a long, unending process. But God is and always will be good, kind, and present.” — Anna

“Sophia loves *Family Retreat*! She really thrives here,” says Anna. “She is loved here, and we’re not looked at as weird. We fit in at Joni and Friends, which is such a relief. Sophia has a disability, but that is not her identity. She is a child

of God. Everyone here sees Sophia as the precious child she is—there are complex, wonderful things inside of Sophia that she can’t express. But she opens doors that would never have been opened to us without her.”



“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

ROMANS 12:15

“I Don’t Have to Struggle Anymore!”

Roger and Merry have nine children. Their youngest, Colleen, is 18 years old and has Down syndrome.

“When Colleen was born, I was angry,” says Merry. “I was homeschooling eight kids, I was still heartbroken over three prior miscarriages, and I was exhausted. Honestly, I wanted to die. But God told me that Colleen was a special blessing.”

“She’s a special lot of work! I told the Lord,” says Merry. “We got kicked out of churches because Colleen wanted to dance during worship. There never seemed to be a place for Colleen or for our family.”

But all that changed when Roger and Merry brought their family to *Family Retreat*. “Here I can be honest about my fears and failings,”

says Merry. “Our family is accepted at Joni and Friends. Colleen can worship, and we’re not kicked out. Quite the opposite, she’s celebrated!”

“In fact, our whole family has been changed through *Family Retreat*,” continues Merry. “Five of our children have attended, two as volunteer buddies. And *Family Retreat* also made Roger aware of his own struggles with autism and multiple traumatic brain injuries—the first one was the result of a car accident when he was just three years old.”

Merry continues, “It was here at *Family Retreat* that Roger first felt accepted. As a result, our marriage has been strengthened.”

Roger and Merry rely on Joni and Friends for ongoing support, especially recently as Colleen has suffered some setbacks. “Colleen always



Family Retreat puts smiles on everyone's faces! (back row left to right: Colleen's sister Jenny, Colleen, Roger, Merry; front row left to right: Colleen's sister Christa and Megan, Colleen's volunteer buddy)

At *Family Retreat*, Colleen is celebrated as a fearfully and wonderfully made image-bearer of God.



had a bubbly personality,” says Merry. “She was full of laughter, loved to joke around, and was very empathetic. But two years ago, she got very sick. I could tell right away that something was dreadfully wrong.”

Colleen went downhill fast. Her physical symptoms were many, including incontinence and extreme weight loss. Developmentally Colleen lost many of her abilities. Her personality became flat. She had difficulty sleeping and lost a lot of her language. After multiple visits to doctors and specialists, Colleen was diagnosed with Down syndrome regression disorder—a serious neurological condition characterized by

the sudden loss of previously learned skills.

“Things are tough,” says Merry. “Colleen is unpredictable, but she has started intense medical treatment, and we’re already seeing improvement. After Colleen’s first treatment session, she actually said her first full sentences in over ten months: *I feel much better now. I am quite starving.*”

God uses *Family Retreat* to feed families starving for love and acceptance. Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support of families like Colleen’s. Your faithful partnership sends them hope through their hardships.

Retreats & Getaways: The Path Toward *Healing*

From Central California ▼

Trauma has been part of Kathy's story since childhood. As an adult, she joined the Army to serve her country and pay her way through college. Her six years of service included deployments to Saudi Arabia and Iraq during Desert Storm.

While Kathy valued the opportunity to protect our freedom through the military, the experience also caused her additional trauma that led her to a breaking point. Following her deployments, her PTSD symptoms worsened, and she began to avoid unfamiliar social situations.

"I have a hard time being around people other than my family. I startle very easily. It is very embarrassing for me, and I don't like to be out in public because of that," says Kathy.

Growing more and more isolated, Kathy realized she needed help and attended a class for combat Veterans. "I had a good experience there," says Kathy. "I was wanting to push myself outside of my comfort zone, especially to be around people I didn't know at all."

Taking a step toward greater healing, Kathy and her husband Mike signed up for a Joni and Friends *Warrior Getaway*. Before arriving, Kathy feared that she would be the only Veteran who experienced an invisible disability. But as she observed those around her and heard fellow Veterans open up about the trauma they had experienced, Kathy quickly felt at home.

"I was relieved that others also had invisible wounds," says Kathy. "It was good to know I wasn't alone. This made me feel like I was at home, and that it's ok for me to be me."

After their second *Warrior Getaway*, Kathy and Mike wanted to give back to the Joni and Friends community, so they decided to volunteer at *Family Retreat*. Their experience was exceptional as it was the first time in more than twenty years that Mike and Kathy could serve others side by side. Mike loved being the one-on-one buddy of a young man with Down syndrome. And Kathy valued the opportunity to create a safe space for families where they could be known and valued—limits, struggles, and all.

Through Joni and Friends *Retreats & Getaways*—both as attendees and as volunteers—Kathy and Mike have found a meaningful path toward healing, trusting God to provide exactly what they need to glorify him every step of the way.



Mike (on the left in the above photo) and Kathy (on the left below) find hope and healing at our *Retreats & Getaways*.



From Mississippi ▼

As a single mom caring for a young daughter with multiple disabilities, Candice couldn't imagine the future God had in store for her. But when she met Charlie and discovered shared beliefs, interests, and values, God began a new season—and a new family.

When Charlie and Candice got married, he adopted then-seven-year-old Huntleigh as his own daughter. And soon, their family grew with the births of Henley and Haelyn.

Now thirteen years old, Huntleigh loves using her beautiful voice to sing at church. Henley, now seven, dreams of becoming a marine biologist or engineer. And six-year-old Haelyn loves catching lizards and frogs.

Joni and Friends brought a new dimension of belonging and purpose into Charlie and Candice's family. *Family Retreat* in particular brings a bright spot of joy to their summer! From the moment they arrive, each member of the family sees and experiences the love of Christ in tangible ways.

At *Family Retreat*, Huntleigh met a volunteer with a disability similar to her own. Sharing about their common struggles and triumphs deeply touched Huntleigh and provided a sense of connection and perspective like never before. She loves making new friends, both at *Family Retreat* and at other Joni and Friends events.

Joni and Friends nurtures Charlie, Candice, and their children, teaching them to see others as Christ does. "Any event you attend, volunteers and staff are selflessly serving families," says Candice. "This ministry challenged me to look beyond myself and my family and serve others in my community."

While attending a Church Engagement workshop at *Family Retreat*, Candice sensed a new call on her life. As her eyes opened to the challenges of starting and maintaining a disability ministry within a church, Candice felt nudged to launch a disability ministry at her family's church.

Joni and Friends came alongside Candice and other church members as they met with staff, planned curriculum, and provided training for volunteers—all of which led to the establishment of their church's disability ministry!

Through Joni and Friends, Charlie, Candice, and their children feel accepted and embraced just as they are. And now, as they serve other families living with disability through their church, they extend the invitation for others to attend *Family Retreat*, open up to new friendships, and step into community through the body of Christ.



Huntleigh and her volunteer buddy find a place of belonging at *Family Retreat*!

Family Retreat is so Much More than Fun!

From Michigan ▼

Randi is a thirty-year-old woman with Down syndrome who is passionate about her dog, horses, and coloring. She takes pride in the fact that, like Joni Eareckson Tada, she is an artist. Randi enjoys working at her job and serving on her church welcome team, where she greets everyone with a warm smile. She loves her family and her awesome mom, Pat. And she loves *Family Retreat*!

Although it took years for family friends to convince Pat and Randi to visit *Family Retreat*, when they finally came, they were captivated by the experience. Since their first visit, they have been back to *Family Retreat* eight times!

What keeps them coming back? Partially, it's the fun, welcoming, and accessible environment. Randi, an animal lover, especially appreciates the horseback riding and the petting zoo—she can't contain her giggle as she burrows her hands into soft bunny fur and runs her palm across wiry goat hair!

Randi is also famous for her yearly hula-hooping performance at the talent show. In preparation for her event, Randi got her nails painted hot pink at the *Family Retreat* spa service. Her stunning look and performance earned her a round of applause. The talent show is Randi's time to shine!

Ultimately, it's more than just fun and relaxation that brings Pat and Randi back to *Family Retreat* year after year. "It's because Randi loves it so much," says Pat. "She likes the attention she gets, and she gets to do some things she doesn't normally get to do. She

really loves befriending her volunteer buddy. That's very special. Randi gets a friend who's devoted to her for four days."

The fun isn't complete without friendship, and hanging out with her volunteer buddy is the highlight of Randi's time at *Family Retreat*. Plus, getting to know Randi and Pat is as much a blessing for their volunteer as it is for them!



Randi earned a rousing round of applause during her spectacular hula-hoop performance at the *Family Retreat* talent show!

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

From the Pacific Northwest ▼

“Trevor is energized by *Family Retreat*,” says his mom, Jessica. “He loves being loved!”

Isn't that true for every one of us, whether we live with a disability or not? At *Family Retreat*, every person is seen through the eyes of God—as fearfully, wonderfully, and miraculously made in his image.

That's true for 19-year-old Trevor, who has Down syndrome, and it's just as true for his parents, Phil and Jessica, and their other children: Oliver (18), Linnea (15), and Lily (10). Trevor's siblings serve as buddies for disabled children at *Family Retreat*. “The impact

of their serving has been phenomenal,” says Jessica. Her message to other families is powerful. “Send your children to *Family Retreat* to serve as a buddy. Their lives will be transformed, and they will come back again and again. Volunteers love *Family Retreat*!”

And of course, Trevor's life has been transformed, as well. “Trevor knows he's not always included outside of *Family Retreat*,” says Jessica. “His world is getting smaller and smaller, and he's become withdrawn into himself. But at *Family Retreat*, Trevor shares his enthusiasm and joy with others.”

That's exactly what he did during the talent show! Trevor delivered an exceptional performance, complete with rescuing a damsel in distress and scaring off the bad guys. At *Family Retreat*, Trevor is seen as the true hero God made him to be.



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Comes to the United States!

Caring for a loved one with a disability is a full-time job, leaving family caregivers desperate for a break from their daily responsibilities. But if you live in East St. Louis, where the nearest disability services lie well outside the city limits, getting time to rest and recover is close to impossible.

Respite has been identified as a top need for families living with disability in the greater East St. Louis and St. Louis areas, where disability rates are two times the national average. Joni and Friends is here to help fill that need.

On June 14th, Joni and Friends broke ground in East St. Louis, announcing a *Joni's House* disability center that

will provide respite care for families in that community.

Joni's House will serve greater East St. Louis and St. Louis through day programs for adults with disabilities, and after-school programs for school-aged children with disabilities. Both programs will operate with the aim of providing practical help and Gospel hope to the more than 3,000 local families in need.

There are multiple *Joni's House* programs throughout the globe, providing complete, Christ-centered care to families with disabilities in low-resource countries. But *Joni's House East St. Louis* is the first *Joni's House* program in the United States.

Anthony Adams is the first recipient of our ministry in East St. Louis. Joni and Friends was instrumental in building a ramp to Anthony's front door so that he can now get in and out of his house using his wheelchair. Anthony was delighted to be part of our groundbreaking ceremony.



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 or call us at **818.707.5664** today!

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Joy to the World

Christmas Cards

This year Joni's new Christmas cards will bring the joy of the season to your friends and family members. Featuring Joni's "Joy to the World" artwork, these festive cards invite you into the first heavenly celebration of Christ's birth—the moment when angels burst through the sky, announcing tidings of great joy. Joni first sketched her glad angel then added the word "JOY" in the style of Hebrew lettering. As a final touch, she used ink stained-glass lines to make the composition worthy of a church window!

Product Details:

- High quality paper stock
- 5" x 7"
- Each box contains 15 cards & 16 envelopes

\$14

Card interior reads:

"The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'" Luke 2:10-11

The Lord has come...
Merry Christmas
May joy fill your heart and home in
this season of celebration!

Joni's Christmas cards are available only through Joni and Friends. Quantities are limited, so please order right away.



100% of proceeds go directly to advance ministry to children and families living with disability.

TO ORDER: • Mail order form • Call toll-free: 800.736.4177
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