

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP



Rejoice
in the Lord always...

from the heart

“Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.
Those who go out weeping... will return with songs of joy...”

PSALM 126:5–6

If you could hear me sing my way up the ramp at our Joni and Friends headquarters, you would know I like to carry a song of joy wherever I go! And during the month of July, I am singing with all my heart as I celebrate milestones of God’s goodness in my life.

July 30th will mark 59 years since I took that thoughtless dive into the Chesapeake Bay and broke my neck. Yes, I celebrate the anniversary of breaking my neck...

Why do I celebrate what seems like a tragedy? Because in that moment, when my forehead thudded against the sandy bottom of that bay, severing my spinal cord, God began a miraculous work in my life, which He would eventually use to bring the message of Jesus to suffering people worldwide.

It may sound strange, but I love looking back to the first dismal years of my journey with quadriplegia. As a terrified teenager facing a lifetime of paralysis, not only did I “sow with tears,” as Psalm 126:5 says. I wallowed in misery, asking my mother to close the bedroom drapes to keep me in darkness.

Not until Christian friends led me into a deeper relationship with Jesus could I fathom that I could “reap with songs of joy,” even if I never walked again. And now, after years of wrestling with why God chose a broken neck for me, my joy positively overflows.

How, you might ask, have I found joy even though my disability and pain have endured?

The source of my joy is the presence and promises of my Lord and Savior Jesus. He, the Lover of my soul, has never left my side through all my years of hardship—paralysis, cancer, chronic pain—not even for one second! And today, I can see God’s plot line of extravagant grace woven through every chapter of my story, even my darkest seasons.

So, here’s the theme of my story and song: what I thought was the ruin of my life was the beginning of God’s greatest use of my life. God used my quadriplegia to transform me and give me a greater love for Jesus. But far beyond that, when I broke my neck, God was looking at millions of other people suffering from



terrible accidents, illnesses, disabilities, and injuries—those He would reach through my life and the ministry work of Joni and Friends.

When I took my life-changing dive, God saw me. And while my pain broke His heart, He also saw what He purposed through my suffering. He was thinking of precious children like Jareth in Honduras, and special needs families like Joshua’s in Georgia and Ricky’s in New Mexico, all of whom would experience the love of Jesus through Joni and Friends. I can’t wait for you to read their stories within the pages of this newsletter.

Back in 1967 when I thought my life was finished, God also saw ahead to this month’s celebrations. He saw Ken Tada and me saying “I do” on July 3rd of 1982, embarking on decades of

marriage that would bring glory to Jesus. And He saw the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act on July 26, 1990, ushering in a new era of greater accessibility for disabled people across America.

And Friend, our Lord Jesus is only getting started. Because as we go about His work welcoming people into the Father’s house, He is preparing a celebration that will last for eternity. So, this month, let’s start celebrating, even through the pain!

Until His house is full,

Joni Eareckson Tada
Founder, Joni and Friends

Celebrating Milestones of Grace

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

PHILIPPIANS 4:4

44 Years of Marriage!

More than four decades have passed since Ken and I began our married life in 1982. And as we celebrate our wedding anniversary on July 3, I marvel at how God has used every trial—every hurt and heartache on our journey—to entwine us far more closely together than we ever dreamed of on the day we married.

It isn't easy taking care of me, a quadriplegic who deals daily with pain. But it's the pain and the problems connected to my quadriplegia that have bound Ken and me together as we cling to Jesus and His promises!

Friend, I want to encourage you today, in your marriage, your family, and your life. May you find strong hope and courage, just knowing that there's a quadriplegic and her husband who are bound to Jesus with cords of commitment and love.

So, take a deep breath and know that your struggles, however intense they may be, are temporary. Life will not always be this hard, or marriage so difficult. There is coming a day when something so glorious will appear, that it will supersede even the best marriage on earth.



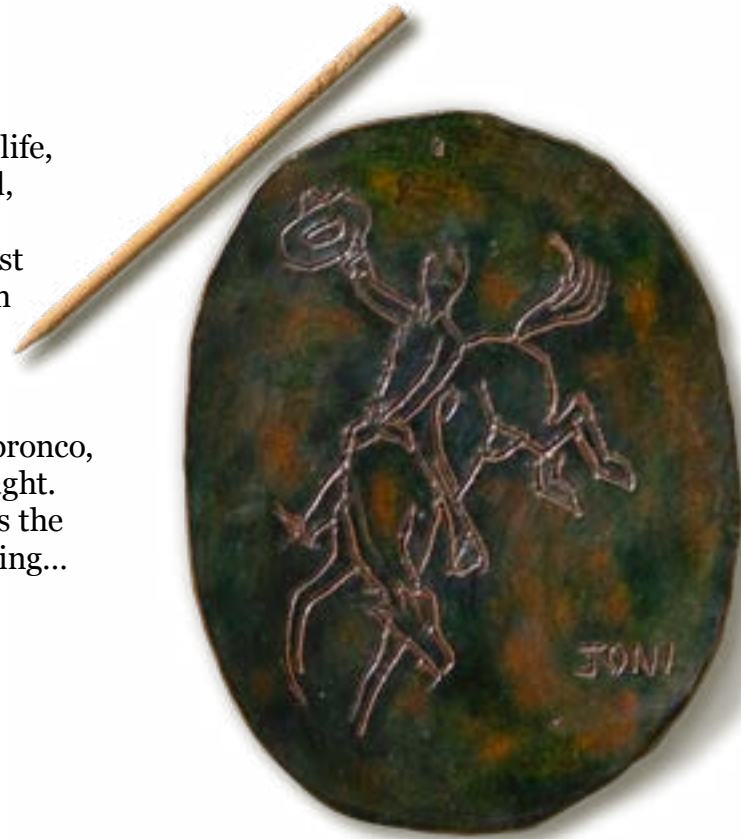
“A cord of three strands
is not quickly broken.”

ECCLESIASTES 4:12

59 Years in My Wheelchair...

Fifty-nine years ago when tragedy upended my life, God provided a joy-filled gift for my anguished soul, and it came through an unlikely suggestion... I can still hear the voice of my occupational therapist telling me to grip a wooden dowel between my teeth to practice making lines on a damp piece of clay. I did not like the idea, but I gave it a try.

You can imagine my surprise when, after a few minutes, I finished my cowboy on his bucking bronco, etched in clay. "I can actually do something," I thought. "The talent isn't in my hands; it's in my head!" It was the beginning of my love affair with drawing and painting... a gift God has used ever since to grow my faith.



36 Years of Advocacy and Ministry

I landed in a wheelchair at a time when there was very little access for people using mobility equipment. Back in the 1970s I would arrive at a restaurant, only to be told to wheel down an alley, past smelly dumpsters, and into a side door that led through a crowded, noisy kitchen, just to reach my dining table.

Then, in the late 1980s, I was appointed by President Reagan to the National Council on Disability. Working with other disability groups, we were able to send to Congress a landmark bill to improve access for Americans with disabilities. Finally, in July of 1990, I sat on the White House lawn with other Council members and watched as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law!



Of course, people living with disabilities need more than just curb cuts, ramps, and Braille translations. Laws requiring accessibility standards are helpful, but they cannot deliver the sense of belonging that disabled people so often lack.

As Christians, we know that our Lord and Savior calls us to a law far higher and more complete than the ADA. Just look at the command of Jesus in Luke 14:13 to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed."

Jesus Christ calls His followers to seek out people with disabilities who often get cast aside and forgotten. He urges us to bring those the world leaves behind into His house, now and forever. It's why the Gospel is the heartbeat of every one of our Joni and Friends outreaches and programs across the globe.

Oh Friend, I'm so thankful that you, like our team here at Joni and Friends, take the directives of Jesus to heart! It is a thrilling honor to work beside you toward our God-sized vision of a world where every person with a disability finds hope, dignity, and their place in the body of Christ!

I have a signature piece called *New Life*. This composition begins on the right side of the watercolor board, with a lifeless butterfly pinned to a fence, representing how we are dead in our sin. Then, within the shade of a leaf, we spot a chrysalis where a transformation takes place inside, hidden from view, not unlike the "mystery of the Gospel" Paul talks about in Ephesians 6.

Finally, there's a brand-new butterfly with wings strengthened through its struggle to emerge from the chrysalis. And our growth in Christ follows the same path! As Acts 14:22 tells us:

"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

I labored over this painting a long time ago, and I have marveled at how God uses the beauty around us to convey His love and concern for every detail of our lives. This butterfly symbolizes God's infinite care and sovereign control over our circumstances, transforming us into a "new creation in Christ Jesus."



You can own your own print of Joni's *New Life* artwork! See ordering details on the back cover of this newsletter.



From Our Hearts... to Honduras!

“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.... Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.”

LUKE 14:21, 23



Thank you for sharing
the love of Jesus with
Jareth and his family!

Recently, during one of Ken Tada's fishing trips in Honduras, he met the father of an eight-year-old boy with special needs named Jareth. Laboring night and day to support his family living in the remote high jungle, Jareth's father shared that his family could scarcely afford food, let alone the wheelchair Jareth desperately needed.

When Ken came home and told me about Jareth's plight, we contributed to Joni and Friends to cover the extra expenses needed to send a sophisticated pediatric wheelchair all the way to Jareth's home through our *Wheels for the World*® program.

And Friend, you simply must see what our Lord Jesus did for Jareth and his family when our teammate Freddy and his wife, a physical therapist named Britny, traveled to the far reaches of Honduras to properly fit Jareth's wheelchair and share the Gospel with his family.

This is what Freddy told Ken and me...

Our journey to reach Jareth's family began in El Salvador, driving across the border. From there we traveled to a small airport where our flight was delayed until the next day. Finally, on a plane that held 15 passengers, we flew to reach Jareth's family.

When we landed, Jareth's mother, Laura, was waiting with a smile. With no public transportation in their area, we took a taxi to their home. Along the way, and over a meal when we reached their home, Laura shared the story of Jareth's disability.

As a baby, Jareth had shown signs of delayed development. At age two, he was diagnosed with microcephaly and cerebral palsy. "When I received my son's diagnosis, I felt like I was going to die," Laura said. Doctors told Jareth's parents he would never walk and likely wouldn't survive childhood. "I cried out to God and thought it was my fault," she confessed. "That guilt stayed with me for a long time."

We spent six hours with Jareth's family, fitting Jareth's wheelchair, making sure he was secure and properly supported. As we worked, Jareth's siblings stayed close. His little brother especially loved observing every adjustment and even holding parts and tools.

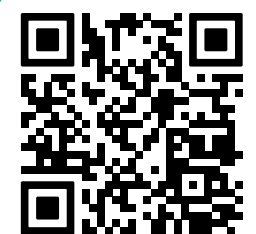
When we finally placed Jareth in the fully adjusted chair, you should have seen his smile. For the first time, he sat upright, comfortable, and safe. Watching his brothers and sisters run around and include him in a game of hide-and-seek was deeply moving. As Laura said, "Before, he just watched from the sofa or my lap. Now he's part of it."

With his wheelchair, Jareth can now enjoy a seat at his family's table, play with his siblings, and go to church. For Britny and me, it was a privilege to serve this family. We leave with deep gratitude to God, who is faithful through long roads, delayed flights, and the everyday challenges of life with disability in such a remote place.

Oh Friend, Ken and I are overflowing with joy. Because Jareth's new mobility is only a taste of God's grace for his family. They have now experienced the Gospel with its sleeves rolled up and travel bag packed... **and they are free from false guilt, having learned that disability and suffering can be part of God's good plans!** Thank you for being part of this powerful kingdom work!

Bless your loved ones & share the love of Jesus!

Your gift given **in honor** or **in memory** of a loved one brings the hope of the Gospel to people living with disabilities worldwide! View your loved one's name on our online Tribute Wall at joniandfriends.org/tribute or by using this QR code!



Your Generosity

From Georgia ▼

Before Joshua was born in 1993, doctors recommended termination of the pregnancy, predicting that he would not survive birth. But Joshua's parents, Ann and Bob, chose life for their son, knowing that he was created by God and made in His image. And, covered in prayer, Joshua survived, not only birth but a journey into adulthood.

Now 32, Joshua lives with significant disabilities caused by a rare neurological disorder and needs a wheelchair and gastronomy tube. As an adult, he has also become more medically fragile and aged out of most locally available special needs programs.

Feeling lonely, Joshua's parents learned about Joni and Friends *Family Retreat*. But, as Ann says, "We had no idea how life-changing this experience would be."

"Arriving at *Family Retreat* for the first time,

experiencing the wave of people welcoming us was exciting and joyful. We were surrounded by people willing to help with Joshua and our needs... The staff and volunteers were enthusiastic and full of the love of God! And Joshua had an immediate connection with his buddy that put our hearts at ease."

Ann continues, "We have found our special family through Joni and Friends. We can now share our deep concerns with parents that have walked the same path and understand the needs of this special life."

Through the love of friends like you, Joshua's family found a place where they feel accepted and loved. Thank you for preparing a place at *Family Retreat* for families like theirs who need to know they are not alone as they navigate life with disability!



Brings Joy!

From New Mexico ▼

When Lisa and Martine brought their 26-year-old son, Ricky, to *Family Retreat*, they held their breath anxiously, bracing for a meltdown. Diagnosed with autism and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Ricky relies on routines and struggles with flexibility.

To Lisa's surprise, despite all the new faces and experiences Ricky encountered at *Family Retreat*, his meltdown never came. In fact, by the end of the first day amid the loving Joni and Friends community, Lisa had a Holy Spirit "aha" moment, realizing that her son was safe, loved, and understood—so she could release her worry and relax.

Ricky and his volunteer buddy, Ron, bonded quickly. Ron, who has a nephew with Down syndrome and autism, naturally understood Ricky and drew out his strengths. For instance, discovering that Ricky has a knack for spelling, Ron encouraged him to take his spelling to the Talent Show stage...

and it was a big success!

While Ricky enjoyed himself throughout *Family Retreat*, Lisa and Martine spent rare quality time together. They also connected with other parents going through similar life challenges and seasons. And while they didn't know it at the time, they were building lasting community and friendships.

Lisa was so moved by *Family Retreat* that she became an ongoing volunteer with our Joni and Friends office in New Mexico, eager to share about Joni and Friends with other special needs families. As Lisa says, "If you're not sure about coming to *Family Retreat*, just come!" And Martine adds, "Dads, there's a community here you didn't even know you needed."

Thank you for providing a place where special needs families are welcomed, celebrated, and invited into God's eternal family!



Bring Joy to Your Home with Joni's Art!

Horse in Wild Mustard

"I have a love affair with horses," says Joni. Horses have always been one of Joni's favorite subjects to render in her artwork. When she created this painting in 1984, she originally intended it to be a pastel pencil drawing. But once she completed the design, she decided, "This simply must be painted!"

Product Details:

16" x 20" (Frame not included with art print)

\$24



New Life

Joni's beautiful mixed-media rendering captures the symbolic beauty of the new life we have in Christ. Using ink and watercolor, Joni portrays a monarch butterfly's struggle to break free of its chrysalis, representing the hardships we as believers face as we become more like Christ.

Product Details:

11" x 14" (Frame not included with art print)

\$24

*100% of proceeds directly advances
ministry to children and families living with disability.*

TO ORDER: • Mail order form • Call toll-free: 800.736.4177
• Online: joniandfriends.org/shop • Phone: Text **ORDER** to 818.707.5664