

The encourager

THE MAGAZINE OF ELEVATE CHRISTIAN DISABILITY TRUST

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Celebration of 40 years



Enthusiastic audience participation



The photos at the top of the pages were taken at National Camp.

Give your hands to service, and

F.R.O.G



A DEVOTION BY FIONA THOMAS

There are many of us to whom life has frequently presented ups and downs, such is the nature of an imperfect world. We all suffer our fair share, and perhaps some of us suffer even more than others, or know someone who has. For me, it was growing up with severe asthma and multiple hospital visits, and in teenage years epilepsy started as a result of a new drug trial given me to stop the cycle of severe asthma attacks.

It is during times like these that the acronym **F.R.O.G. (Fully Rely On God)** has really helped me keep my mind focused where it needs to be - on God. This has been in times when my seizures caused Todd's syndrome, or at one stage a hemiplegia taking years to accept.

In more recent years when I have often felt that the whole world was against me and all I had the energy to do was quietly **F.R.O.G.**, John 16:33 would speak to situations like these perfectly. Jesus reminds us that although we can often feel as though the world is against us, we need to trust in Him because He has overcome the world.

This is one of the ways **F.R.O.G.** helps me, it helps me to remember the promises that God has given us. Promises like in Psalm 91:4 or Romans 8 that remind us that we have a loving God on whom we can rely, and that through Him we are more than conquerors. I need to heed this daily, for

my husband has early onset Alzhiemers, and our daughter struggles daily with Aspergers, but still manages to inspire. Kevin has a smile for

everyone anytime, and tends only to say, "Mum, can I have an ice cream," even at 4am on the odd occasion! Many a time I have felt myself slipping down to feeling just like a tadpole. In reality, it is very hard to **F.R.O.G.** I have to remind myself to be diligent, fully relying on God. Over the last three years relearning to walk after gangrene and sepsis had tried to finish my time here, I heart-fully thanked Him for the interventions He has put in my path, such as gifted surgeons, intern pastors, friends, family, and brothers and sisters in Christ, caring caregivers who go the extra mile or ten, and all those who intervene in prayer for us in these times. I feel assured, regardless of where I am or in what situation I am in, my God is the same yesterday, today and will be forever (Hebrews 13:8). That is the reason why I can **F.R.O.G.** I pray this will help you where ever and whatever your situation is in Christ.

Remember, when the storms of life are raging around you, do not be fearful and tremble, telling God how big the storm is. Stand your ground and tell the storm how big your God is! We have a great need for Christ, but we also have a great Christ for our needs. (Spurgeon). ■



CAMPS 2017

Please take note and put in your diaries

Kidz CBM	10-12 March	Blockhouse Bay, Auckland
Wellington CFFD	24-26 March	El Rancho, Waikanae
Emmanuel Family Camp	31 March-2 April	Totara Springs, Matamata
Auckland CFFD	7-9 April	Carey Prk, Henderson Akd
Torch (Blind and VIP)	20-23 April	Capenwray, Bible Coll Cambridge
National Labour Weekend	20-23 October	Totara Springs, Matamata

EXCERPTS FROM THE TESTIMONY OF NATIONAL CAMP SPEAKER *BECKE MEDINA*

Life is a journey, not a destination. There's no truer statement to describe my life than that. In this life, I have walked winding, curvy roads. Paced myself through long, dry deserted roads. And ran through busy, over-crowded streets. But regardless of the paths, I know I have not been on this journey alone. God has been with me, every step of the way. And because of that, every step in my journey has meaning.

Along the journey, I have discovered more about who God is. Knowing Him has helped me learn and love who I am in Him. Growing up with a birth defect and Tar Syndrome makes it easy for others to try and tell you who you are and who you are not. You see, this world is eager to define us. It's eager to tell us what we can do and what we can't. It didn't take long for me to figure this out. I remember starting school and having to remind my teacher who I was, instead of who I was not. Because of that, I easily compiled a list of what I am not. I am not a mistake. I am not broken. I am not cursed. I am not incapable.

I graduated with high marks and attended university. I wanted to be a lawyer, I didn't even think twice about asking God what He wanted me to be. So I pursued my degree and applied for Law school, but He had other plans. I did not score high enough marks to enter Law school and was greatly dejected. But God knew there was more. He brought me to a job at my local newspaper as a copy editor, which then led to a reporter and editor position. But most importantly, it created an opportunity to combine two of my greatest passions - writing and missions. I was able to write articles about the mission trips I had gone on, I wrote about a trip to Ecuador and El Salvador, during my time at the newspaper. And then my journey had a change of direction. It was around this same time, the Lord was calling me to serve as a youth leader at my church. It soon became something I loved so dearly. And before I

knew, I was leaving my job at the newspaper to pursue ministry. From there the Lord took me to a job assisting our state youth director, which included helping plan camps and large conventions. Then I left there to be a part of a church plant, where I served in every role possible. I was the administrative assistant, children's director and youth director, all at various times during my time there. It was also at this time I felt the Lord call me into long term missions. I raised funds and went to live in Jamaica for 6 months, serving in a children's home. It was a few years after returning home, that the Lord lead me to Kenya, Africa. I went for a few weeks with a friend to help at a youth camp and I fell in love with the country. I knew I had to go back, so I then lead 3 teams from my church there to help build a church and do ministry there. It was during this trip I felt the Lord asking me to give a year in Kenya. And what a year it was! Nothing what I expected but everything more! After all it allowed me to meet Pastor Geoff Wiklund and get the opportunity to come here and speak at your camp. We often will not know exactly where He is leading us, but when we allow God to truly be our guide life becomes greater than we ever could imagine.

I truly believe we all are disabled in some area of life. After all, that's why we proclaim God is ABLE. You see, He is always able, even when we aren't. That's the beauty of the journey, that along the way we discover we aren't walking alone. There's an amazing companion wanting to join us. One who is capable, when others say we are not. One who is lovable, when others say we aren't. One who is faithful, when no one else is. One who is close, even when everyone else feels so far away. Most importantly, One who is enough, even when the world say we aren't. ■



Here's how Becke related to our Campers (from the evaluation forms)

Awesome – such a gifted speaker
Amazing – such good teaching
Simple but profound messages
The Best! Loved her joy
Her love was bubbly and infectious.
A great choice!
So crystal clear – I learned a lot.
She was off the Richter scale!

Outstanding communicator.
Really relatable and funny.
Fabulous interaction with everyone.
Appropriate level – loved her smile and giggle
I loved her enthusiasm, encouragement,
testimonies and being challenged
Qualified to speak – felt it, been there, done that
– definitely amazing.



Talking is sharing, but



The 40th Anniversary

Excerpts from messages sent for the 40 year celebration

Margie Willers spoke of the four decades: "1976 – I was then 28 years of age. A graduate from Faith Bible College Tauranga. And pregnant! Yes -

spiritually pregnant - eagerly awaiting giving birth to a God -assignment. For sometime, a strong rapport had developed between Di Willis and myself. We both dreamed a dream that together we'd one day spearhead a christian organisation.



"Our goals:- to bring a hope to

the hopeless: to evangelise. And empower disabled people to aspire to their God -potential. And their ultimate, God fulfilled destiny.

We aimed high. The reality of our situation – of ourselves we most certainly had no resources to draw upon. We needed help. A huge ' team to build the 'dream' we 'god-driven women' envisaged."



Joni Eareckson Tada sent across her greetings.

"I remember I first became connected with Di Willis and her team 26 years ago at the Congress on the Church and Disability, back in 1990. It was there at Wheaton College, here in the United States, that Di extended an invitation for me and my husband, Ken, to visit New

Zealand. Now I knew about Di Willis'

work because as a woman with a disability, I had been so inspired by the story of Margie Willers. I just had to go to New Zealand to meet this lady, and to see the work, and was I impressed! ELEVATE Christian Disability Trust has been doing the most remarkable ministry among people with disabilities and their families, encouraging, instructing, inspiring, and uplifting, as well as providing a myriad of opportunities for people with special needs to come together, to celebrate the goodness of God in the midst of their weakness.

But what I really love most about ELEVATE Christian Disability Trust is its emphasis on the Lord Jesus, and His grace, as well as the great support services provided to some of the neediest people with disabilities in New Zealand. This has kept this wonderful ministry humble, and it's kept it grateful, and I think that's why God continues to bless your efforts."

Listening is caring.

Anniversary Celebration



Brian Vincent,
a deeply moving song



Evan Clulee
Philippines message



The branches and ministries were
all presented with a banner.



Torch



The Centre



Emmanuel



Ministry groups
brought items



Joy Ministries



The most foolish person in the world is the one who does not have, instead of being

The debt that I owe to

my parents

Thousands have watched clips of Sarah Kovac driving, playing the piano, applying makeup and even cracking eggs. Simple, everyday tasks, right? Not without the use of arms or hands. Sarah was born with arthrogryposis multiplex congenita, a genetic disorder in which leg or arm joints are essentially stuck in place and muscles don't develop. For Sarah, those locked joints — and the muscles within those joints — run from the base of her neck to her fingertips.

Beginning at an early age, Sarah learned to rely on her legs and feet to handle the duties of four functioning limbs. Today, those duties include raising a 6-year-old and a 2-year-old. Sarah shares the lessons she's learned in her 2013 book, *In Capable Arms: Living a Life Embraced by Grace*.

Parents of a child with disabilities might wonder how they, too, can raise their child to have confidence and courage. Sarah here speaks of the debt she owes to her parents: When I was in kindergarten I broke my arm four times. My arms don't bend, they just break. My parents had the strength to watch me go through that over and over and still say, "You can learn to ride a bike. We'll take off your training wheels." I would come across things that I couldn't do or didn't want to because it was too scary for me, but they let me discover those things instead of determining them for me.

Many parents have a hard time with this, understandably, because they feel their child won't develop to his or her full potential. So they intervene. They say to the child, "Maybe you should do it this way, or do this with your mouth, or use your other hand," and that sort of thing. I cringe a little bit when I see that, because in my experience it was really helpful for my parents to back off and let me find my own way.



When you're a parent of a child with special needs, you have the internet and doctors and therapists who all have different opinions — and all these things are needed — but it's hard to step back and say, "God, I trust that You're going to show me what to do. I trust that [my children] will find their fullest potential in You."

Words often have an impact on a child's self-esteem. Can you remember examples of words or descriptions your parents used that stuck with you over the years?

I came home from school one day after somebody told me I was handicapped. This was during the 1980s, and that was the word used back then. I'd heard the word before, but I don't think I'd ever been labelled that way. So I said something about it to my dad, and he said, "You're not handicapped. You have a handicap, and there's a difference."

I learned that I am Sarah first and foremost, and I also happen to have a disability. I don't have to let myself be defined by these things. There's no escaping it, but it doesn't mean it's who I am.

I also remember my mother telling me that a good artist can work their mistakes into the bigger picture. I'm not saying that God makes mistakes. ... God is the artist and can work anything for good. It's a comforting thought. ■

that person who complains about what he
is thankful for what he does have.

Wow! Baptising one's own children at this camp

God is a God of abundance. His blessings are pressed down, shaken together and overflowing! At the 2016 National Elevate camp, we witnessed a most marvellous event – two of our children were baptised!!! At the 2014 camp, one of our daughters, Sophie, had been baptised, and now Fletcher and Aimee have made their own personal public declarations that JESUS IS THEIR LORD.

God had been stirring each of them over the last couple of months, and prior to coming to camp they had shared at home their intentions to make this next step on their spiritual journeys. As a family we are so blessed to attend the Totara Springs Camp together, and to learn how to serve and be served. What we experienced as a family was an outpouring of God's love and service through those at the baptism, the amazing weather, warm pool, the wisdom and strength of Pastor Geoff, the inclusion of Tim (their dad) in the baptising, and the loving words and pictures of encouragement, faithfully shared by individuals from the 'Camp family'. What a privilege to hear God's word spoken over our son and daughter, to have beautiful pictures shared by Jacqui, and to record these precious moments for later reflection.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you, Camp family, for partaking in and making the Camp so spiritually significant and special. Truly, truly...God is AWESOME!!!

- From the Van Amerigens

The best weekend of my life

Camp was a chance to slow my life right down and be a human for three days .

Yun Chen, my charge, and the other participants moved at the pace life dictated to them, and if I was going to be of any help I had to be available at all times . I marvelled at Yun's faith, but also I delighted in it as I could see he was free from bondage through his faith in God.

Everyone at camp agreed on one thing - Jesus is the boss.

We all surrendered to Him daily, and everything else fell into place . It was the best weekend of my life: the teaching, the small groups, the Cabin time teaching, the compulsory sleep time, the food (wow), the swimming pool, the worship, and the laughter.

- Donal Keane

It was truly humbling!

This is my family's first time coming to the Elevate Camp. When Penny invited us I was nervous about what to expect here. However by the end of the first day, I could honestly say it was the best camp that I'd ever been to. Being welcomed with a feeling of acceptance among a diverse group of people who love God was truly humbling. The speaker

highlighted the point "That God is...enough!" This was empowering. Even when my toddler with Down Syndrome faces daily physical feeding and vomiting issues, I can be confident, knowing God is sustaining my family through this season of life. I'm excited about the next camp, and want to invite friends with children who have special needs too!

-Gaylene Vashi

National Camp from the view of a couple of helpers

Camp can be one of the most tiring, exhausting, and emotionally challenging experiences. You may have very little sleep, physical tiredness from manual handling, and even emotional or spiritual battles. So then why have we come for another camp?

It's because of:

- The joy of seeing someone change from crying to go home on their first night, to begging not to leave by their last night.
- The smiles, laughter and jokes.
- The movement of God in lives – chains are broken!
- Hearing amazing stories and testimonies of how God moves.
- Seeing a camper beam as they come to realise how much Jesus loves THEM!
- Learning selflessness by having to put another's needs above your own.
- Another amazing camp – thanks for the good times!

-The Hendersons





*"Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes
- Billy*

We faced Wild and Outrageous su

Diane Sullivan writes:

My husband and I have four children and our personal journey with Emmanuel Support started just over 24 years ago when our third child was diagnosed with epilepsy. She was very delayed reaching her milestones, which we didn't pick up on as all our focus was on her two year old brother who was very unwell with chronic asthma and very severe food allergies. Our daughter's seizures started at three months and she was diagnosed at nine months. Several years later she was also diagnosed with Development Dyspraxia and Aspergers with Severe Anxiety Disorder.

About the time of her epilepsy diagnosis I heard on Radio Rhema one of the announcers interview his wife about living with a child with epilepsy. I felt she was describing "our situation and child". I wept as I listened, but thought, in my ignorance that as we had started medication there would be no more seizures. A few days later however another seizure. I phoned the radio station and spoke to the announcer, and God in His wisdom prompted his wife to make a surprise visit to the station at that exact moment. I spoke with her for more than an hour, finishing with an invitation from her to attend an Emmanuel Support meeting the very next morning. For me, the group was a life saver, and quite literally a Faith Saver as I struggled with the attitude of some of our church family on my daughter's diagnosis. Our son with his allergies and asthma was everyone's "darling", everyone knew him, looked out for him and made sure he was medically safe. With our daughter, it was different. Church people were making wild, outrageous and false suggestions about "who had sinned". Others were wanting to "cast out demons" from our baby girl. A statement that was continuously made was "but we prayed for them last week!!!" We were told to confess our sins, pray harder, have more faith, then our children would be healed.

I spent the next three years raging at God, begging, pleading with God, trying to wrestle my children's healing from Him, but being told by church family



"how dare you say these things to God", "you shouldn't feel that way" and "don't accept it."

With the birth of our 4th child I was struggling with very deep Postnatal Depression and exhaustion. When our youngest child was a year old we had a guest speaker with a healing ministry visit our church. As he gave the call for people to come forward for prayer I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked around, knowing I was in the back row with only the wall behind me. I rose again, the hand stronger, holding me in my seat. Then a voice very gently said, "In my time and my way". I felt God's amazing anointing like warm oil pouring down over me. In that moment there was healing, not physical, but it was in my heart and emotions, and 'I knew that I knew that I knew' that God was going to heal our children in His time and His way. I was no longer to keep asking God to heal them but to thank him for the healing He was going to do. I could now stop fighting God, and realised my job as a mum was to raise our children just as they were. What joy!!!

That was the start of my journey back to wholeness in Jesus. Although our son grew out of most of his food allergies he received healing of his gluten intolerance at age 16 in a bakery of all places. After many gluten challenges over the years with our son being disappointed to be given gluten products and then having them taken away from him when the challenge failed, God prompted me to suggest to him

"As a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened."
Graham

uggestions as to who had Sinned!

a gluten challenge while standing in a bakery. If God had healed our children when they were younger it would have only been my testimony. However this is now our son's testimony also.

During this time Emmanuel support was a place of safety, where I discovered a God who loves me, YES HE LOVES ME, even in my pain, anger and frustrations, with all my imperfections and flaws. I was allowed to grieve, to rant and rage, vent and cry, with my new friends gathered around crying with me. This was very healing, not physically but emotionally and spiritually as I discovered anew who God and Jesus are. I learnt to love our children just as they are. Over the years I have seen many families come and go who

have seen varying levels of support and friendship. Some of us have continued to journey together because we see the value in being able to support each other as we and our children face the challenges of life. Just because our children get older, things don't necessarily get easier, just different, and as any parent of a child with a disability knows, the grief you feel resurfaces with each milestone your child doesn't reach. We have learnt to celebrate even the tiniest of achievements and success. We have built life-long friendships, laughed and cried together, celebrated and mourned together, and have been able to show God's grace, love and acceptance in a safe, non-judgmental place just as it was given to us.

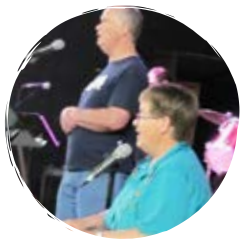
Emmanuel Support, a support group for parents who have a child with a disability, is just one of the ministries under the Elevate umbrella. It was started 25 years ago by a young couple with twin daughters with intellectual disability, who were struggling with their family "fitting" into the church, even though the dad himself was one of their church pastors. The uniqueness of the group comes with being a Christian group, **where hurting families can find comfort, wholeness, prayer and acceptance, without judgment, in the midst of their circumstances**. Where the parent's pain, anger, grief and hurt are recognised, allowed and validated. As the co-ordinators and members of the group are also parents of a child with a disability we have the unique perspective of truly understanding and knowing the rollercoaster of emotions that come with raising a special needs child, and are able to get alongside other parents and walk the journey with them. We have an annual Parents' retreat each Queens Birthday weekend. We also have a Mums' Retreat each year and monthly Coffee Mornings for the mums. The dads also get together occasionally for breakfast and golf, bowling etc and try to have an annual Dads' Retreat. We also get together for dinners for parents.

FAMILY CAMP

This year we had our very first **Family Camp** (shown here). It was held at Totara Springs, Matamata with five families coming for a great weekend. Each family was allocated a support person/buddy to help where the family needed, as a buddy for the child with a disability, a companion for a sibling or just to be there to allow mum and dad some time out. We had a program for the children, meetings for parents, a great family picnic with games and plenty of free time and activities for the whole family. **We have another camp planned for 31 March to 2 April 2017**, again at Totara Springs, and would love as many families and helpers to attend as possible. Our Facebook link: www.facebook.com/emmanuelfamilycamp



If you are a parent and can relate to any of what has been said, and would like to have a chat or join us at one of our mornings, we would love to hear from you.



People will not always remember what you said or did, but...



*Here in Part 2
Margie Willers
concludes her
article "HAS GOD
LIMITED HIS
POWER?"*

Let's consider the
following situations.
Was it not the SAME
POWER that delivered

Daniel from the lions' den
that gave Stephen the strength as he was stoned?
As his accusers hurled those unrelenting, harsh rocks
which beat the life from Stephen's body, he prayed,
"Father, lay not this sin to their charge." Now, isn't
that a supernatural response? That's NOT human!
Human is to shake your fist into the face of those who
are mistreating you. Supernatural love is to love your
enemies - That's the POWER OF GOD!

Was it the same power that healed the lame man at
the door of the temple [Acts Chapter 4] that gave
the Apostle Paul the strength to endure **'the thorn
in the flesh'**? And, that same power that released
Peter from out of his prison dungeon enabled Paul to
remain in his prison to die. Why did God take Peter
out and leave Paul inside to die? Oh, where, oh where
in the Scriptures is the recorded 'Spiritual formula'
??? Oh, have I ever a list of questions I'm going to ask
God one day when I arrive in Heaven!

At the moment we're living in 'faith'. We do NOT
have all the answers this side of Eternity.

I'm certain it was the **same power** that took Jesus
through the Garden of Gethsemane that raised Him
three days later.

We cannot pigeon-hole God. He's a God of variety.
He'll not tolerate 'us' shutting Him in a box. He's a
GOD OF VARIETY. He works in mysterious ways.

PART 2: HAS GOD LIMITED HIS POWER?

Let's be honest, we're SO eager to want to skip all
the hard bits, dodge all the difficulties. I suggest, if
we haven't something of 'tension' in our lives and
if we're not living without answers in our lives, then
I sense, maybe God's work in our lives hasn't much
substance – not yet!

If there were no struggles, where would the word
'HOPE' be, the word PATIENCE and the word FAITH?

I've never seen a young person come into maturity
who has been given everything handed him on a silver
platter. I've seen spoilt brats! God allows pressure to
grow us, to develop us.

Another courageous story is recorded in the book
of Daniel – Let's focus our attention upon chapter 3.
verses 17 and 18. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
- these three men were a unique calibre. Believe me,
there's no fairy-tale-faith evident- not in this story.
We read:- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were
summoned to appear before the king. And, at his
command they were to bow down and worship the
heathen statue. They refused to obey.

Nebuchadnezzar was so outraged, he ordered all
three men thrown into a furnace - a furnace heated
seven times hotter than usual.

ALL they were required to do was: Kneel at the statue
and they'd miss being thrown into the fire.

WOW! WOW! WOW! Listen to their response: "Oh
Nebuchadnezzar, we're not concerned about what will
happen to us. Should we be thrown into the flaming
furnace our GOD is able to deliver us out of your hand.

**But, if He doesn't ... please understand, Sir...Your
Majesty – that even then, we will NEVER under any
circumstances bow down and serve your god!"**

How about 'we' personalize this situation? 'BUT IF
NOT'... I'm a Woman. ALL WOMAN. However,
I'm markedly disabled. Severely physically limited.
There are days when I feel SO 'trapped' – sitting

but they will always remember how you made them feel

LIMITED HIS POWER? by Margie Willers

in my power-wheelchair. It's taken a long, spiritual process for me to pray, "Please understand Father, I will never again raise my fist in Your face and scream 'WHY'? But if notI'm going to journey this veil of tears with YOU and KNOW Your power to take me THROUGH the circumstance."

Allow me to ask, What is your **FIERY FURNACE**? Maybe you've experienced frightful bullying in the work-place? Sexual or verbal abuse? Divorce? A Battling with the big 'C'? Financial ruin? The list is endless...

God did NOT prevent the three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from being thrown into the furnace – they most certainly WERE thrown into the flaming fire, BUT the excitement in this story – **GOD HIMSELF WENT INTO THE FURNACE WITH THEM!** They walked out Victors - Heroes of the faith.

What's your perspective of GOD? For myself, I'd rather know and experience the POWER and ongoing PRESENCE of GOD in the circumstances. I recognize God's perspective is very different.



In conclusion: A very SPECIAL lady who has profoundly impacted my life is JONI EARECKSON-TADA .

At seventeen years of age Joni became quadriplegic – paralysed from her neck down. Aged in her mid 50s, chronic pain syndrome plagued her body. Then five years

on – another faith-tester - Breast cancer. A total mastectomy followed with chemo and radiation therapy. Several times Joni could have thrown down the gauntlet, choosing to wallow in depression, despondency and despair. **SHE DID NOT.**

By GOD's divine enabling Joni aspired to rise above those insurmountable odds. Today, she's a high profile speaker, prolific author, talented artist, and SO much more!

I'm most privileged to have been a guest in her home, and at her ministry headquarters – JONI and Friends Inc. We've shared from the same public platforms. I esteem and affirm her as one of God's choicest jewels to the CHURCH . An outstanding advocate for disabled people – worldwide.

To me, God is not limited by our personal circumstances. Sometimes He chooses to release someone out from their wheelchair. Hallelujah! However, when God chooses to come through with 'something different', or He chooses NOT to heal - and that person [such as JONI] remains a life-time in a wheelchair.....Allow me to ask, - **HAS GOD REALLY LIMITED HIS POWER?**

A Christian friend shared this quote by Alan Redpath:

"There is no circumstance, no trouble, no testing, that can ever touch me until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ, right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose."



The best Christmas gift

by Joseph J. Mazzella



The best Christmas gift I ever got was both early and late. My first born child came into this world on December 16th, nine days before Christmas. He was supposed to be a Thanksgiving baby however, so when my wife went into labour three weeks late he had to be

delivered by an emergency Caesarean section. My first word when I saw him wasn't even a word but a sigh of relief, love, and joy. My early Christmas present had a red, splotchy face from being overdue, but it was washed several times over the next few days with happy tears from me, my wife and several grandparents.

My son was named Joseph John after me, and "J.J." as he was called soon became the most cuddled and photographed child around. He was the first grandchild on both sides of the family, and spent his first Christmas going from arms to loving arms as everyone wanted a chance to hold him. I looked forward to a blessed life watching my first born grow up to be a strong and smart man.

That dream, though, wasn't to turn out the way I thought it would. As my son entered his second year we realized that his language wasn't developing as it should. He only seemed interested in a few things, and would jump up and down over and over to amuse himself. We finally got him tested, but were given no answers. We were only told that he wasn't normal. It was raining that day as my wife and I drove home, and finally we pulled the car over, held each other, and added our own tears to the storm.

With the end of that dream came the birth of another. We decided to find out exactly what was "different" about our son, do all we could to help him become all he could be. Soon a local Doctor saw what the specialists hadn't. Our son had Autism. In that day very little was known about Autism or what could be

done to treat it. My wife and I read every article and researched every treatment there was to help our son. We put our anger at God aside, and asked instead for His love and guidance to help us with our boy. We enrolled J.J. in Special Education at school, and worked with him every day at home. We were blessed to get a loving, kind-hearted, and patient personal-aide for him at school, and she became like a second mother to him. It was by her side during another Christmas season that my boy spoke his first sentence about the beautiful Christmas tree at the school.

As we continued to work with my son I noticed something else too; his loving spirit was also working on us. His smile was contagious, his cheer was infectious, and his innocent love was purifying. Over the years I became a better, kinder, more loving and more spiritual person just by being around him. He taught me so much about love, so much about joy, and so much about embracing life. His language continued to improve, and he became beloved by his teachers, fellow students, and especially by the school football and basketball teams where he worked as the equipment manager. His loving presence became a comfort to my days. His gentleness helped me to deal with money struggles and career problems. His sweetness helped me when his younger brother was born with an even more severe form of Autism, and I gave up teaching to care for them both.

Now, as the best Christmas gift I ever got approaches his 28th Christmas with me, I have realized that he is the gift that keeps on giving. Like a ray of sunshine he brightens the day of everyone he meets. Like an earth angel he touches the souls of others with his gentle love. He shares his smile with everyone, and calls everyone by name. He goes through his life making this Earth a little more like Heaven. He lives out God's dream for him which is a far better dream than mine ever was.

May your Christmas and all of your days be full of the best gift there is, the gift my two special sons give me everyday-the gift of LOVE. God bless you always.

Philippines C.F.F.D

EXCITING GROWTH IN THE THERAPY DEPARTMENT

The therapy department is currently having a good line up of committed Christian therapists/teachers people.

We now have two Occupational Therapists (Venus and Ishang), one Speech Pathologist, one SpEd teacher and an assistant. The kids with special needs keep on coming, but sadly we cannot accommodate them all due to lack of personnel. We cater for 25 kids every Wednesday and Friday, then seven on Tuesdays at the moment. But not all of them are

coming. Most of them are children with Autism. Some have Intellectual Disability, Language Delay, Down Syndrome, Attention Deficit, Hyperactivity Disorder, Sensory Processing Disorder, and others are Blind. Good behaviour, learning and speech are manifesting from the kids as reported by their caregivers and teachers. The therapy staff continue to envision a therapy centre where the kids and the parents will find skills and hearts integrated to be at their service.

WE HAVE A GREAT STORY TO TELL

As we manage kids with special needs God has performed miracles! We would like to share the stories of three of these who have improved and are able to join the general class, moving from one on one to SpEd class to general class.

Alecs Drei Fernandez, an ADHD kid, was initially received for one on one session to target work behaviour and social skills problems. After one year we launched him to the SpEd class, then after another year we recommended him to be enrolled in a grade I general class. He is now on his grade II and was recently awarded a ranking of 4th Honor in the class. His mother was so happy and proud.

Then we have Miguel Nuque, a five year old boy with Autism. Upon receiving him for OT session he was hyperactive and manifesting stimulatory behavior. He also has sensory processing problems that impede him from his functions. But after one year of attending the therapy session Miguel exhibits

improved behaviour that has made him appropriate to join the SpEd class.

Lastly, we have Jirou Gabrian Fuerte, a five year old kid with Autism. When we accepted him for OT Session Jirou had different manipulative behaviours like crying and whining, he was also fidgety and had poor fine motor skills. But after two years of religiously attending the OT session, Jirou developed an enormous improvement! The whole family of Jirou was rejoicing back then until now because last year, Jirou graduated from attending OT Sessions. He is now part of a regular-big class.





"I can do things you cannot. You can do things I cannot."
- Mother

Never Judge a Book

by its Cover

By Helena McNeill

Have you heard the saying '*never judge a book by its cover*'? Well, I think that's what happens when we hear the word 'disability'. People get a certain picture in their head (bland, awful, disturbing, pity), and think they know what it's all about.

But we all know that the book 'Gone with the Wind' is not a story about the weather!

In the same way, the words 'disability' or 'special needs child' is not a tragic story about wheelchairs, supportive equipment, therapists, diagnosis and medical issues; it can involve all those things, but that is NOT what the story is about!

If you look beyond the wheelchair, equipment, the differences, the mess, the stress – when you get up close you discover it is A LOVE STORY. I'm not talking about a Disneyland/Hollywood kind of love; but a deeper, fiercer, tougher love - a sacrificial, crazy kind of love that makes you walk away from your dream job and move countries.

*It's a love that many won't recognise.
A love that comes with a high price tag.
And it's a love that messes with you.*

And when you are in this love story, you get used to doing life with a lump in your throat, and finding tears stinging your eyes all of a sudden in the most mundane moments.

That love story crashed into my life 11 years ago with the birth of my twin girls, Jazmine and Sunshine. They were born three months early, and Sunshine paid a high price to survive - she has severe cerebral palsy and is profoundly deaf. She can hear us today, thanks to the miracle of a cochlear implant, but needs full time care 24/7. She also knows how to love, and has a smile that will rock your world.

For a long time after the diagnosis I felt crushed, completely smashed, thought life was over, but it wasn't; it was just going to be very different.

That's what it is – a different journey, a new normal. Our family lives and moves to a different rhythm. It has limitations. There is more work in our daily routine. Truth is it can be exhausting: physically, mentally and emotionally. And Spiritually! I can't even begin to tell you the mysterious journey disability takes your faith on.

But having Sunny in my life means I get a front row seat to something holy. My day always ends the same. Every night I give Sunny a final goodnight kiss, and pause to soak up the beauty...those adorable chubby cheeks, the long lashes, her blonde curls...I don't know how to explain it, but it is holy ground. It rips open my heart in such a bitter-sweet way. Even though it can be so incredibly heartbreaking, I wouldn't want to live without that girl and her smile.

And in that moment I see something...something beyond the surface. And I feel I can hear God whisper "See! The greatest is love." That's the story that needs to be told about disability. To see the holiness, see Jesus, see the image of God, see the transformation that it can bring into our lives.

It's a story about a family, a mother, a father, a sibling, living out a messy, complicated, heartbreakingly - beautiful love story.

It's not telling us about how much can go wrong; it's telling us how much love there can be when everything appears to be going wrong.

It's the story that gives dignity and honour to people with a disability and their families, seeing them as the most cherished people in our churches and communities.

I'm hoping one day it will be a best seller...

...I cannot, Together WE can do great things."

er Teresa

How to find Jesus...

Do You have the peace in the midst of storms?

You can if you turn to the Lord Jesus.

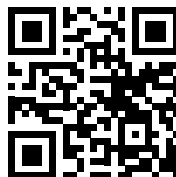
1. Confess any sin you have (everyone of us does wrong things)
2. Ask Jesus to come into your heart and life as Saviour and Lord.
3. Thank Him, and tell someone that you have become a Christian.
4. Get a Bible, start reading it and begin praying.
5. Find an active church and tell others about your new faith.

Two Vacancies at the Head Office

We are looking for someone to fill and develop the exciting role of **Activities Coordinator** for the Drop in Centre.

There is also a part-time position for a **Finance/Accounts** person who has excellent knowledge of NZ account practices.

Email jobapplications@elevatedt.org.nz for more details.



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Joy Ministries - National Gaylene Pluck	gaylene@courage.co.nz	07 847 4383
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Able to Worship - Warkworth Methodist Church Jenny Totter	k.jtotter@extra.co.nz	09 422 7358
Kumbayah - St David's Presbyterian Church - Palmerston North Ann Bennett		06 355 2818
Bible Friends - Wanganui Louise Rostron	rostrons@extra.co.nz	06 344 5955
THRIVE - Greerton Bible Church, Tauranga Bronwyn McCurran		07 541 3943

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TOTARA SPRINGS, MATAMATA

