Joni and Friends continues to bring Ukrainians with disabilities, like Oxana, over the border into safety. See their faces and hear their stories inside!
I shake my head in awe of friends like Jan van den Bosch (be blessed by his story in this newsletter). We call him the Flying Dutchman because Jan serves on our International Board of Directors and ever since 1982 he’s been flying back and forth between Holland and America, helping to develop and strengthen our international outreach.

Jan is a treasured friend. He’s famous in the Netherlands for his pioneer work in Dutch Christian media, as well as for his global investments to empower the poor, children-at-risk, and people with disabilities. And Jan does it all in the name of Jesus Christ.

When we began helping to evacuate Ukrainians with disabilities, it was Jan who was the first to roll up his sleeves and do everything he could to find accommodations in his nation for these refugees. And he’s still “working his network” to locate more accessible housing. But Jan isn’t the only one helping…

I’m thinking of behind-the-scene helpers, like the bus drivers who hoist Ukrainian paraplegics in their arms and carry them up the bus steps to their seats. Many of these drivers do not know Christ, yet they tirelessly log hundreds of miles to bring these people to safety. Some drivers have even changed the soiled disposable underwear of children with disabilities.

This is how God “loves the foreigner residing among you” as the verse says above. Hearts are being transformed and the Gospel of Christ is being proved over and over with each evacuation. Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, is using the “weak of this world” to bring his Good News into Dutch living rooms, Polish hotel lobbies, German care facilities… and yes, even into the hearts of bus drivers.

He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. — Deuteronomy 10:18

One more thing. I have been utterly overwhelmed by your generous gifts and profuse prayers, all of it making possible each evacuation. Thank you, dear friend, for showing that Jesus Christ is the same compassionate God of Deuteronomy 10:18 – defending, loving, and giving his hope to Ukrainians with disabilities and their caregivers!

Jan isn’t just a member of our International Board of Directors. He’s a treasured friend!
Giving Hope to Ukrainians with Disabilities

When Russia invaded Ukraine, Jan van den Bosch, a member of our Joni and Friends International Board of Directors, didn’t waste one minute.

“Joni reached out to our Ukrainian friends, Sergiy and Nataly, who connected me to Galyna, our Joni and Friends in-country coordinator. I just asked, ‘How can I help?’ and Galyna organized the evacuation groups. Galyna is truly my hero, as are Sergiy and Nataly. They are living under circumstances you wouldn’t wish upon your worst enemy. Constant bombing. Constant fear,” said Jan.

As Joni explains, “Galyna is our boots-on-the-ground in Ukraine. She’s in lockstep with Joni and Friends and has her finger on the pulse of what’s happening, tracking down and rescuing disabled people out of harm’s way. Because when air raid sirens go off, they cannot jump out of bed, grab a few things, and make a dash for the bomb shelter.”

“It’s a four-day bus trip for the Ukrainian evacuees,” said Jan, who resides in the Netherlands. “We are giving them shelter, hygiene products, medical attention, clothing, and food – including cakes decorated with the Ukrainian flag that say, ‘You are safe with us.’ They come traumatized, but after a day of food and rest, their mood changes 100%.”

“We have doctors and provide psychological care on site. When the children arrive they are terrified, but the next morning they are playing together – acting like children. So much has happened to them, yet it is amazing how resilient they are.”

Oleg, an eight-year-old boy with intellectual disabilities, arrived at our safe-house in the Netherlands utterly traumatized. He was hiding in complete darkness in a basement for eight days before being evacuated out of war-torn Ukraine.

“He is so very scared of darkness,” said his mother. Jan knew exactly what to do. He ran to his car and returned to Oleg with a simple flashlight. After showing Oleg how to use it, the little boy’s disposition instantly transformed.

“That flashlight is a bar of gold!” said Oleg’s mother. He held it all through the night. It made him feel safe and brought peace to his broken heart.
“We can house 400 people total,” said Jan, “and we’re committed to caring for these families for at least a year. As long as the Russians are claiming Ukraine as their territory, these families can’t go back. We will house them, feed them, and give them medical care. We need to be committed to provide shelter, comfort, and hope long-term. This builds trust.”

“Every day I can see the Ukrainian evacuees forming a community. They are becoming a family and find comfort and even joy in being together. Yet they are always thinking of their family members left in Ukraine, fighting for their country, or hiding in caves and basements. They will not surrender to the Russians. Their reply to this war is rooted in their faith.”

Jan is inspired by the spirit of these Ukrainian evacuees. “All they say is, ‘Thank you, thank you, thank you’ while making the sign of the cross. They are so grateful! Though they are from another culture and speak another language, they are Christians, and we are Christians. Christ is our common bond.”

While Jan inspires the world to be the hands and feet of Jesus, it is the Ukrainian evacuees who inspire him. “I had a meal with a young girl with an intellectual disability,” said Jan. “She had endured the four-day journey from Ukraine to the Netherlands and never stopped smiling. She kept making the letter “V” with her hand. “V” for Victory! She really touched my heart. She wouldn’t give up. And neither will we.”

As long as little children are hiding in blackened basements, as long as people with disabilities are trapped in war zones, as long as it is called “Today,” Joni and Friends will follow Christ’s call in Luke 14 to “go out quickly into the streets and alleys, into the roads and country lanes, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame so that God’s safe house will be full.”

Please continue to pray for Galyna as she selflessly evacuates people with disabilities and their families from Ukraine. And pray for Jan’s team as they provide long-term care for these families in the Netherlands. Your prayers are shining the light of Jesus into the darkest corners of Ukraine.
The Blessing of Marcela

Marcela has cerebral palsy. She outgrew her first wheelchair to the point that it became dangerous to use it. Her father, Arnoldo, explained that Marcela’s strong, spastic movements caused her wheelchair brake to release. “She fell and hit her face. I couldn’t afford a new wheelchair for her. They are very difficult to obtain in El Salvador.”

But when our Wheels for the World™ team met Marcela, she received a brand-new wheelchair that was a perfect fit! “I am very grateful to everyone who made this possible! I have experienced the closeness of Jesus!” said Arnoldo.

We shared the Gospel with Arnoldo and Marcela that day, but they aren’t the only ones who received Good News! There were 278 people who got a new wheelchair at that Wheels for the World outreach, and 519 people accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior! Thank you for sending the love of Jesus around the world through your prayers and gifts!

“IT’s sad because often times we’re looked at with pity, but I consider Marcela a blessing – not to be pitied,” says Arnoldo. “My dream is that God would give me strength to be with her each day and make her days a joy!”

Marcela outgrew her first wheelchair to the point that it was dangerous. It no longer fit her properly, and it didn’t offer her the support she needed to hold her head up.

Our Wheels for the World team worked on Marcela’s wheelchair for over five hours to ensure it fit her properly. Her safety, comfort, and dignity remained priorities throughout the process.

Scan here to watch Marcela’s story!
From Chicago

At birth, Buddy weighed one pound and 11 ounces. Doctors told his mom, Sheila, that Buddy would only live a few years at most. Yet last March, Buddy celebrated his 39th birthday. “Buddy is 39 and he’s like a three-month-old,” Sheila says. He is blind and has cerebral palsy. Buddy can’t speak and receives his nourishment from a feeding tube.

Some people turn away from Buddy, fearing that in his presence, they won’t know what to say or how to act. Sheila and Buddy don’t always feel welcome when away from home and family, but at Family Retreat, they had an uncommon and deeply fulfilling experience.

“I just can’t say enough about it,” says Sheila. “Every day should be like Family Retreat. I had high expectations, but Joni and Friends met every one – above and beyond what I could have ever imagined. My heart was so full!”

From Pennsylvania

When Dick and his wife Judy opened a home for children with disabilities in the Philippines, Joni and Friends was instrumental in helping them partner with other like-minded ministries overseas and even funded the installation of an elevator in a nearby school so the children from their home had access to the second floor during the school day.

While in the Philippines they met Maria, a young girl living with blindness and intellectual disabilities, chosen by God to become their adopted daughter. Since Judy’s passing, Dick and Maria have attended Family Retreat, and Dick has become very involved as a volunteer at various Joni and Friends events. He even helped launch a Men’s Care group!

“Family Retreats and volunteer opportunities have gotten us back into a fuller life,” says Dick. “Maria is a people person. Although she is not always understood she will talk to anybody that will listen. She likes meeting new friends at Family Retreat, as well as singing, dancing, and most of all the Zip Line! The Bible teaching that is on her level and presented in a way she can understand is big. Family Retreat gives us common ground as a family of believers.”

From Texas

Despite the rare deformities that severely limit her mobility, Grete is a happy 3-year-old who is ‘on the move’ in every other way. Her mom, Jani, is raising Grete and her older brother alone. She works hard to provide for her children but struggles to make ends meet. She longed for a wheelchair for Grete so she wouldn’t have to carry her everywhere, and that prayer was answered when our Wheels for the World team from Dallas went to Cuba.

Grete’s first wheelchair, specially fitted by tender-loving hands, will keep her safe and help her become even more independent. “I cannot wait to take her to church so that everyone can see her new wheelchair that was given in love!” Jani declared!

Very soon, Grete will begin kindergarten, and Jani is filled with the hope that she will learn to write her name by holding a pencil in her mouth just like Joni!

For that, we feel so blessed!”

From Missouri

Qorban has cerebral palsy as well as other complex diagnoses that cause him to have seizures and have left him visually impaired and non-verbal – communicating largely with a speech device.

Raising a child with such severe challenges has taken its toll on Qorban’s parents, John and Juliana. “Three times I’ve seen my son’s body lying lifeless during intubation,” says John. Emotional trauma and physical exhaustion impact John and Juliana’s spiritual lives, too. When your reserves are drained, raising a child living with disability can tempt you to doubt God’s love.

Family Retreat is meant for families like Qorban’s. “A lot of people don’t understand the difficulties we go through. At Joni and Friends, we have an instant connection and everyone understands!” say John and Juliana. “Family Retreat gives us a sense of belonging.”

“Sliding down the water slide with Qorban and helping Matea (Qorban’s little sister) catch her first fish are memories I’ll have for a lifetime,” John said. “Family Retreat was good for our relationships with one another, and it was good for our relationship with the Lord. We left Family Retreat so full of life – our minds recreated, and our spirits refreshed. For that, we feel so blessed!”
We gratefully acknowledge contributions given in memory or in honor of loved ones to further ministry in the disability community. To give a gift in memory of a loved one or in honor of a special occasion, visit joaniandfriends.org/donate or contact Joni and Friends 818.707.5664
Brighten someone’s day with these cheerful cards featuring floral artwork by Joni and encouraging Bible verses!

- **Hope:** “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you….” Ephesians 1:18

- **Happy:** “Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!” Psalm 144:15

- **Joy:** “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” Psalm 16:11

- **Love:** “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

Contains 5 each of 4 card designs with envelopes.

5” x 7”

$16

100% of all sales go directly to support disability ministry!