

Extras



Why?

My Lifelong Question

By John Kim (read more about John inside...)

I grew up in a long line of Christian families, and I started attending church as early as my pre-school days. Yet, I had somehow missed out on having a personal relationship with God. There might have been different factors contributing to my distance from God, but one clear factor was my sister.

As a child, I had never given much thought to her uniqueness other than the fact that she spent most of her time playing by herself. I could not understand the “burden” my mother was placing on me to include her in my circle of friends, which I refused to do. And it was only when I reached the later years of grade school that my parents took me aside to explain my sister’s uniqueness, her mental retardation.

Even with this knowledge, my way of treating her did not improve much. Rather, I resented God for allowing her to be part of my otherwise “normal” family. The *Why?* question became my favorite question during those years. *Why is my sister the way that she is? Why is God so silent and indifferent to the hardships and sufferings of my family?*



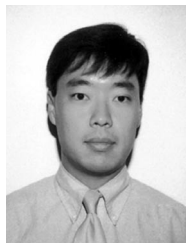
John and his sister Helen eating ice cream.

In the mid '90s, I came to the States from South Korea primarily to obtain an advanced business degree, which I thought would help me in my pursuit of success and happiness. Little did I know then what more God had in store for me to receive. When I could not have been more oblivious to Him, God graciously revealed more of Himself to me, leaving me no room to question his presence and even nearness. I still vividly remember the time when I spent an entire day wiping away the endless tears of gratitude streaming down my cheeks. Not that the situation with my sister had changed, but rather my distorted view on God and His “aloofness” had finally changed by His grace. I found myself still asking the *Why?* question, but only a different kind of *Why?* *Why did God not give up on His pursuit of me even when I did? Why did God grant me such a blessing when I did not deserve any?*

As my relationship with God became personal, my heart toward my sister began to change. I found myself praying for my sister, desperately asking God to love/save her just as He had done for me. I eventually came to the

(Continued on page 3)

"We believe everyone is created in God's image and can relate to God. We also



Introducing...

John Kim

We are pleased to be working with John, an intern from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, this summer. John, who has a master's degree in International Business and Marketing and has worked in marketing for General Electric, is prayerfully applying his professional knowledge to the Friendship Ministries setting, and we are grateful for the ideas and the insights that he is contributing to our work.

John also brings to this position disability ministry experience through a number of organizations, including Vision New England, The Arc of Danvers, MA, and Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital.



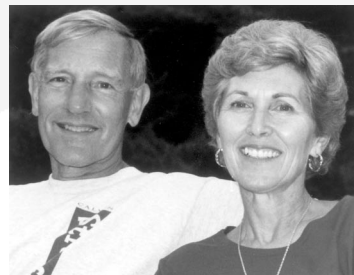
Introducing...

*Elizabeth (Rodriguez)
Waterfield*

Elizabeth, who works from Miami as our Amistad Representative, has a marketing degree from the Universidad Autonoma de Bucaramanga in Colombia. She and her husband, Daniel Waterfield, have a son, Gabriel, who is 17 months old.

Here is a word from Elizabeth about her involvement in Amistad: "When I was younger in Colombia, I worked with children that had—and have—the same kind of problems that I am working with now. This kind of work gives me fulfillment, and very much enjoyment. These children have a special place in me and in my heart. I have a lot of joy working in this ministry. My husband has a speech impediment which I am helping him with also. I would appreciate any kind of support that you can offer—it would be greatly appreciated by me and this ministry. Seeing these young children and young adults grow through this ministry is a very wonderful thing and a great thing to experience."

If you would like to be in touch with Elizabeth to find out more about Amistad or to let her know about Spanish-language ministries in your area, please feel free to contact her at waterfie@crcna.org or 954.792.3550.



Introducing...

*Ralph and
Carol Honderd*

You may have noticed Ralph and Carol's names in previous issues of *Extras* but we thought you might like to get to know them a little better. Ralph and Carol, who retired from teaching careers, are volunteer representatives and fundraisers for Friendship, and they spend a great deal of time tooling around the country in their motor home, sharing their passion for the ministry of Friendship. Their daughter, Karyn, has been part of a Friendship class for many years, and they have seen wonderful blessings—both for friends and for mentors—grow out of this experience.

Be sure to keep an eye on their travel plans in our "On the Road" feature. Perhaps they'll be in a place near you sometime soon. Or, if you would like to suggest that they visit your area in order to speak with a group of interested people, give us a call! You can contact them at hond@calvin.edu



Introducing...

Gwen Penning Genzink

Although Gwen is brand new to the role of Assistant to the Executive Director of Friendship Ministries, she comes to us with several years of experience as a Friendship mentor. She says about this experience, "I began as a very hesitant volunteer, but over the years I have been so blessed by the friends and mentors in my group—life wouldn't be the same without them!"

Gwen welcomes hearing from you, so please feel free to call her (800.333.8300 ext. 787 or 616.224.0787) or to e-mail her (genzinkg@friendship.org) with your questions, concerns, stories, inspirations, accomplishments, hopes....

In addition to her position with Friendship, Gwen works as an artist, and she hopes to combine these two interests by creating new individual and group art projects for Friendship. She would love to hear your thoughts on this as well.

believe salvation is a gift that is not dependent on a certain level of intelligence.”

God's Work of Healing through His Family

By John Kim

During my visit to Friendship Ministries, Nella invited me to her church picnic, where our friends took an integral part in the time of good fun and the feast. Nella informed me that the picnic is one of the events our friends would not miss for the world!

One of the things I was struck by was how open and social these friends were, which was in contrast to what I am accustomed to. Through my experience as a pastoral visitor or a ministry volunteer, I have come to learn that many of our friends carry emotional wounds from the society that marginalizes them, thus requiring healing and rebuilding of the broken trust.

Socializing with the friends at the picnic, many of whom were freely approaching me without any sense of apprehension, made me realize that the process of God's healing has been taking place in their lives through the church. And I dare assume that the same healing process is taking place reciprocally in the lives of many members of the church, as our sovereign God uses our friends to be His servants of healing.

(Continued from page 1)

conviction that the hopeless desperation displayed in my prayers for my sister reflected my misconception – that maybe God does not love her as much as He loves me because of the way that she is. I was reminded of the fact that God's lavishing grace came to me even when I did not understand the depth of His great love for me. I realized, then, that my sister's inability to (cognitively) understand God's love would not, in any way, decrease His perfect love for her. This gracious revelation has brought such a liberating peace to my love and care for her.

I praise and thank God, for He has used my sister to help me understand the breadth of His compassion. As I look back upon this journey of knowing God and His love, I find myself, once again, asking the *Why?* question: *Why does the God of the Universe, the Ruler of All, care so much about someone like my sister who seems so unlovable in the eyes of this world? Why is my sister, who can hardly comprehend His love for her, so precious to Him?*

Although He did not answer all of my *Why?* questions, God did show me the truth – that His love is, indeed, great! And this precious truth, in turn, has made my *Why?* questions no longer questions of importance to me in my love relationship with Him and with my most dear sister, who also happens to be my sister in Christ.

ON THE ROAD...

We plan to make "On the Road"—a schedule of where we will be traveling in the coming months—a regular feature in *Extras* in the hopes that this will help us to connect with more of you in person. So be sure to glance over the list below to see whether our staff members or volunteers will be making a stop in a place near you....

Tony and Diana Rock:

- August 20-22: National Down Syndrome Congress, Minneapolis, MN

Nella:

- September 22-26: National Council of Churches in Christ—Disability Committee, New York City and Long Island, NY
- October 14-18: Christian Educators Fellowship, New Orleans, LA
- November 18-21: The Arc, Boston, MA
- February 2-5, 2005: APCE, Vancouver, BC

Ralph and Carol:

- Stay tuned for details.



from the director

By the time this reaches your mailboxes, the summer will be partly over and you will be planning for the fall Friendship classes. In this issue we are focusing on the Friendship Ministries staff. As new classes get ready to start and established classes get ready to resume, we want you to know that we, as staff, are here to support you in whatever way we can.

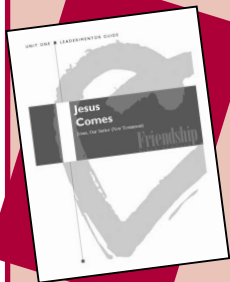
A couple of things come to mind that may be of help to you in organizing your class or finding volunteers. When a family calls from another congregation and wants to have their son or daughter come to Friendship class, tell them that you would love to have him or her join, but ask them to help you find a mentor from their own congregation. This encourages the person's congregation to take responsibility for their own member, helps you with volunteer mentors, and provides a channel of communication to that congregation. I began doing this several years ago and have found that the families have been very open to this idea.

Recently several group leaders have called and said that sorting the take-home papers for each class and doing all the cutting is a burden. The best solution lies in delegating these jobs. Mentors can easily be given

the entire unit of take-home papers for their friend and can make it their personal responsibility to bring the appropriate papers each week. If you don't have enough mentors for each student, you might give each mentor the packets for several students. Another suggestion is to find some 5th or 6th graders from the girls club who would like to do some volunteering. If you give them a unit at a time, they could easily help do the cutting, or even the coloring for some of the figures for the group Bible Study—activities that kids this age tend to like. Think of this as a way to begin training them for future volunteering. How about honoring them at Christmas with an invitation to meet the class and receive some reward?

We hope that this issue of *Extras* will have helped you to get to know us a little better, and we look forward to getting to know you better as well. So please do be in touch with us. And please keep new groups in particular in your prayers. They are beginning a new ministry that likely has never been done in their church before.

Nella Uitvlugt



The *Jesus, Our Savior* Bible Study series is now available! The series contains six units, and the lessons follow chronologically from the Old Testament lessons, treating Jesus' birth as a fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises. If you begin this new series in the fall, you will still be able to do separate lessons on Christmas in December.

Remember to sign up for our e-mail newsletter! We have 600 members on the list, but we know that not all of you are there. We invite all group leaders, mentors, and other interested people to subscribe by sending an e-mail to friendship@friendship.org with "sign me up for your e-newsletter" in the subject field.

Also, if your group would like to receive additional copies of *Extras*, please let us know.



We would love to hear from you:

Nella Uitvlugt, Executive Director
2850 Kalamazoo Avenue SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560
Voice: 616-224-0842
Fax: 616-224-0834
E-mail: Friendship@friendship.org
Website: www.friendship.org
Toll-free: 1-800-333-8300