

words flow articulately. Audiences most appreciate Joni's zest for life and her enthusiasm. Her limbs stay motionless, but her eyes and face sparkle with expression.

Joni moved to California some years ago, and has added the spectacular scenery of the American West to her repertoire of paintings. "Though I can no longer splash in a creek and ride horses," she says, "I can sit outside, and my senses are flooded with smells and textures and beautiful sights." She reproduces those scenes, sometimes before an audience, with her remarkable mouth-artistry.

In her talks, Joni sometimes refers to the massive barn that stood just outside her studio in Maryland. It was Joni's favorite building on the farm, for it housed her fondest memories: the sweet-smelling hay, the rustling sounds of restless horses, and the dark corners she explored as a child.

Joni describes its enchantment, its beauty, and her father's pride in its workmanship. But then she describes the nightmarish memory of a fire set by vandals that utterly destroyed the barn. That terrifying scene is etched in her mind: the wild screams of her pet horses, the smell of burning flesh, the frantic efforts of her family and neighbors to contain the fire.

The story does not end there, however. Her father, stooped and twisted from arthritis, began again the arduous task of reconstructing the barn by hand. The foundation remained, and on top of it he fitted new boulders, new beams, and new boards. The second barn, the re-created one, was even grander than the first.

"I am like that barn," Joni says. "I thought my life had been crushed beyond repair. But, with the help of God and my friends, it has been rebuilt. Now can you understand why I'm so happy? I've recovered what I thought would always elude me—life in all its fullness."

Two Who Suffer

Joni Eareckson Tada and Brian Sternberg represent those unfortunate persons for whom pain seems to be in revolt. Quadriplegics, cancer victims, parents of children with birth defects—these people of uncommon suffering may well cringe from a concept like "the gift

of pain." To them, the phrase must sound hollow and sadistic; pain has left its natural cycle and become a Frankenstein.

One gained fame because of her suffering, the other lost fame because of his. After several decades, both are still incapacitated in body. Yet in their individual ways both Brian and Joni have found strength to continue, and even to grow, and their trust in God is an integral part of that process of healing wounded spirits.

Brian squarely faces the question of causation. Is God responsible? He and his parents are convinced that his condition is as abhorrent to God as it is to them. His conclusions run counter to some themes in this book, for he disallows such thoughts as the transforming value of suffering. Although he recognizes that God has providentially used his pain to bring good, he rejects the notion that God might allow such a condition to continue for the rest of his life. He has gambled his faith, and almost his theology, on the hope for healing.

Yet even that position, which seems more and more untenable to the Sternbergs' friends, signifies a turning toward God. Brian has held to a trust and belief in a loving, worthy God despite a level of torment that few will ever experience. In heaven, Brian will surely walk with the confident stride of a Job or a Habakkuk or a Jeremiah, who saw the world at its worst and still believed.

Joni Eareckson Tada's pain, except for brief flashes, has been mostly psychological, the pain of loss. Yet her life has been marked by a dominant grace note of triumph and joy. She wrestled with God, yes, but she did not turn away from him. She emerged with a spiritual depth and maturity that has brought inspiration to millions. I do not imply that every afflicted person can duplicate the success story of Joni Eareckson Tada. They cannot; Joni has unique and multiple gifts and talents. But in the way that she has used them, she has achieved something else: she has "dignified" suffering.

At first Joni received a flood of letters urging her to pray for healing, or berating her for lack of faith. She did pray for healing, of course. In the summer of 1972, after an intimate service of healing with about fifteen people present, she became convinced that in the next few weeks her spinal cord would miraculously regenerate. She

even called friends and warned them, "Watch for me standing on your doorstep soon; I'm going to be healed."

It did not turn out that way. And in her books Joni explains why she was forced to the difficult conclusion that she would not receive physical healing. Joni now calls her accident a "glorious intruder," and claims it was the best thing that ever happened to her. God used it to get her attention and direct her thoughts toward him. Apart from the accident, she says, she probably would have lived a typical middle-class life: aimless, comfortable, with two divorces under her belt by now.

The injury changed all that. Over time God's grace in Joni's life became so evident that she now stands as an emblem strong enough to silence puerile arguments about faith. *Does lack of healing mean lack of faith? But what about Joni Eareckson Tada?* More, Joni became a striking demonstration of transformed or "redeemed" suffering. After succeeding admirably as an author, actress, singing star, and artist, she decided to devote herself instead to her area of greatest expertise: her disability. Today, Joni directs a ministry called "Joni and Friends" that sponsors conferences and seminars, and funds worthy projects for the disabled.

It is Joni's dream to awaken the church to the needs of the disabled, and to equip Christians to perform a healing role in all society. The crowds are smaller now. Far fewer people turn out to hear a seminar on helping the disabled than to hear a personal testimony. But, step by step, Joni is bringing hope to those who are disabled, and enlightenment to those who are not.

Thank God, very few of us will endure the trials of Joni or Brian. But in different ways, they have each lived out the truth of John 9: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." Following the pattern of the blind man of Jesus' day, two modern-day quadriplegics, one from Seattle and one from Baltimore, have brightly displayed the work of God.