

Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles....Isaiah 40:31 [nrsv]

Wings

**A FAITHLETTER FOR, BY AND ABOUT
UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Spring 2001 — Vol. 11 Issue 4 No. 44



FROM WHERE I SIT **By Jo D'Archangelis**

I had never even heard of Mariposa Ministry until one day about eight years ago a man named Ken Tittle called me on the phone. He said he was with Mariposa Ministry and that the pastor of his church had given him a copy of *Wings* — could he come up to see me? Sure, why not? I replied.

At the end of our first meeting, Ken asked if I would like to be part of Mariposa, and even though I still wasn't quite sure what Mariposa "did," I said... sure, why not? After receiving a bunch of Mariposa literature in the mail (and later, cruising through the extensive and juicy Mariposa website* and participating in Mariposa-based e-mail groups), I soon came to learn what Mariposa was all about. More importantly, in learning what Mariposa was all about, I came to learn what I was all about.

Well, perhaps I knew pretty much what I was all about by that time. But I had never before seen the issues that I had dealt with (or, in some cases, failed to deal with) as a child, teenager, friend, lover, wife — and continue to deal with as a human being with a disability — so clearly and insightfully expressed. The stories of Mariposa were both epiphanies and at the same time confirmations of my experience.

Recognizing that you are not the only disabled person in the world to have struggled with certain feelings and beliefs can be very liberating. One of the most liberating of Mariposa readings for me was "Ascension: The Women of Mariposa"*** — a beautiful and terrible first-person recounting by several women in the Mariposa group of sexuality exploited and denied. It was the first time I had seen the topic of dis-

abled women and sexuality presented, much less presented with such honesty and understanding. Although their cultural context was in many respects different from mine and I had

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even the most imperfect of human temples.**

never experienced the brutality some of them did, I saw myself in those women and was filled with both sorrow and joy.

Mariposa is grounded in traditional Christian beliefs, but it doesn't pound you over the head with creedal statements that you either have to accept or go someplace else. In fact, people of little or no faith (and even of non-Christian faith) have been able to participate comfortably in Mariposa and

to extract what they need from it and to give back to it what others may need.

As for myself I find I best deal with my disability within the framework of my relationship with God. Nonetheless, I was turned off by those Christian outreaches to people with disabilities that seemed to say that I had to be healed to be saved or saved to be healed or at the very least to get God in my life because I didn't have anything else going for me. Mariposa's message to me was simple: the Spirit of God is pleased to dwell in even the most imperfect of human temples.

Some years ago Ken asked me to write a foreword for a book based on Mariposa discussions he hoped to have published. At that time I wrote:

I encountered Mariposa Ministry at a much later age than most of its adherents, who are mainly young adults. But with the friendship and support of Dr. Ken Tittle, founder/co-director of the group, Lupita Alonso Redondo, co-director, and others, I found myself, a bit to my surprise, still learning and growing in the process of living with a lifelong disability. But that's what Mariposa gives to you at any age: surprising insights and renewed growth as a person with a physical disability.

That is still as true for me today as it was then. And I plan to continue within Mariposa to explore and enhance my relationships with God, the church, able-bodied society, the disability community, and myself. Hopefully, I will never become too old to learn, to grow, or to be surprised.

*www.satcom.net/mariposa

**www.satcom.net/mariposa/rise_up.htm

See page 4 of this issue for more on Mariposa Ministry and its plans for the summer.



It was twelve years ago in 1989 that Jackie Goya... telephoned me to join her and some others to begin a program in the California-Pacific Annual Conference for persons with disabilities. My husband Jim and I recall the faith and the joy of living that was so evident at that first gathering in 1990. Congratulations on the 11th anniversary of the Earl Miller Spiritual Life Retreat!

— (Rev.) Loyce McWee —

EARL MILLER SPIRITUAL LIFE RETREAT FOR ADULTS WITH ORTHOPEDIC AND/OR VISION DISABILITIES

Friday, June 8 - Sunday, June 10, 2001

Camp Cedar Glen [near Julian, Calif.]

Retreat Leaders: Bill and Gigi Tell

Registration Fee: \$75 per person

Retreat Dean: Tom Simmons

[e-mail: tommyboy_92503@yahoo.com

telephone: 909-351-8544]

Retreat Registrars: Norm and Helen Stockwell

[e-mail: N6ns@flash.net, telephone: 310-374-1535]

[A retreat flyer/registration form is enclosed in this issue of Wings]

THOUGHTS ON A MANIPULATIVE GOD

By Richard Daggett

Almost every time I'm interviewed by a reporter, they say something about how "brave" I am (for some reason this happens more often if the reporter is female!). The first time I heard this, I didn't know how to respond; it took me by surprise. Now I tell them, as politely as possible, that bravery has nothing to do with it. Bravery is when a person consciously puts their own life in danger to save or protect someone else. A person who happens to have a disability has not made a conscious effort to be disabled. It just happens. They still have the desire to live as full a life as possible — just like everybody else. You don't have to be brave to do that.

Over the past several years I've received a few letters from polio survivors who are angry. They feel that they were encouraged, even pushed, to go out and make an active life. They feel this is why they are having trouble now with Post Polio Syndrome. While I certainly sympathize with them, I don't agree with this outlook. I'm not sure I would have done things much differently even if I'd known about polio's late effects. I'm a richer person for the people I've met and the things I've done.

I've also talked with polio survivors and others with disabilities who are having a really tough time. They sometimes say, "Why me?" I think to myself, "Why not you? What makes you so special that you are immune from life's problems?" Of course, I don't actually say that to them (well, sometimes I do — it depends on the person and the circumstances).

I don't believe that "Why me?" has any point. We know that bad things happen sometimes, but it isn't because we do something to deserve it or are "good" or "bad" people. If you are walking down the street and a brick falls off a building and you are underneath it when it falls, you will be hit. God didn't put you in that spot, and God didn't drop the brick.

If you happen to be exposed to a contagious disease, you run the risk of contracting that disease whether you are a good person or a bad person. I have a strong belief in God but not in an anthropomorphic God who looks like an old man sitting on a throne. I can't believe in a God who manipulates people's lives and events like a puppet master.

I remember a play I saw in the early years of public television. It was called "Steam Bath," and the steam bath attendant was supposed to be God. Every few minutes he would walk to the corner of the room and start pulling levers. He

would say something like, "There's a black Buick going down Highway 9. I think I'll make it miss the curve and go over a cliff." It was an interesting play but bad theology.

I do believe that God created the world. I believe it because the world is so complex and so wondrous. It works. But when he created it, he withheld one key ingredient from most of nature, an ingredient he only gave to us — the ability to differentiate between good and evil. People have that capacity; falling bricks and disease germs don't. I believe that God is at work in the world today just as God has always been, working through ordinary human beings. He comes to us in the incarnation of caring people, of friends who support and uplift us. I believe this because I have seen it and experienced it.

I'm writing this shortly after my 59th birthday, and I hope to have many more. So far I've had a very interesting life. It's been different, but everyone's life is different. There are many things that I haven't done that I wish I could have done. I would love to have walked the entire length of the John Muir Trail. It would have been exciting and challenging to have designed and built my own house. I think I would have made a good husband and father too.

On the other hand, I've done many things that others only dream about. But at this point I will simply say: to be continued....

Excerpted from an unpublished autobiography. Daggett, a member of the United Methodist Church of Downey, Calif., is actively involved in the Polio Survivors Association in Southern California and edits the Polio Survivors newsletter. His e-mail address is richard@polio-association.org.



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A non-official, non-profit quarterly newsletter published for, by and about United Methodist adults with disabling conditions

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E-Wings An e-mail version of *Wings* posted quarterly in unformatted text without graphics is available by contacting Jo D'Archangelis at JODARLIS@aol.com.

Wings Website Selected articles from *Wings* issues 1995-98 may be found at www.satcom.net/mariposa/find_wings.html.

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United Methodist Congress of the Deaf National Conference
July 15-18, 2001
Los Altos United Methodist Church
Los Altos, California

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Portland, OR 97232
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SEMAR: A Theology of Hospitality

Over the last 40 years or more, we have been trying to include people who are different from us in our lives. We have tried to say that we are all alike and should be treated alike. To be inclusive has been our goal, but inclusiveness is a political term or term used to talk about making something part of the whole. We have made some strides but have a long way to go.

To make our churches inclusive of persons with disabilities, we have built ramps, made accessible restrooms and water fountains, and even cut off pews. And when we talk about accessibility, we are always talking about these physical barriers. Our churches, however, remain obstacles to people.

The biblical term is "hospitality." This is to welcome, to be friendly, kind, and loving toward strangers or new arrivals in our lives. The emphasis here is not on buildings, concrete, and steel. The emphasis is on people and relationships. It is to invite people into our lives. This is not just saying hello [to them] at church but inviting them home for dinner.

This is what Christ demands of us. We want to be able to enter buildings and fully participate in the worship and fellowship part of church. With the surrounding society mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act to be accessible, what does it say when our churches are not? We want to be accepted as people of value and worth with gifts and abilities. We want to be loved and to love. We want to be invited into your heart and to invite you into ours. This is the Ministry of Hospitality.

— From SEMAR —
[South Eastern Methodist
Agency for Rehabilitation]

Disability Awareness materials may be downloaded from the SEMAR website at www.semar-umc.org. They include:

- ◆ 2001 Service of Hospitality including worship service, texts, hymns, and "gleanings" on the texts
- ◆ Disability Awareness Sunday materials from previous years as resources
- ◆ Information on how to start a group home for persons with disabilities
- ◆ An article on starting a Deaf Ministry in your Annual Conference

Those without access to the Web may request copies of any of the resources by contacting SEMAR Inc., P.O. Box 128, Lake Junaluska, NC 28745, Telephone 828-452-2881 ex. 732/734 or 1-800-52-SEMAR (Voice), 828-452-7640 (TDD), Fax 828-452-4332, E-mail semar@primeline.com.



CHILDREN OF LIGHT

By Barbara Garcia

The ten weeks of confirmation classes, service projects, study, and fellowship passed by quickly, even for the teachers. Everyone agreed that it had gone well.

There was one especially bright spot. Peter had moved to town and decided that he would sign up for confirmation in spite of the difficulties the muscular dystrophy gave him in getting around and in making a place for himself in a new community. As it turned out, things went better than any of us had thought. Being the gregarious personality he was, Peter soon had lots of friends, and the other kids seemed to sense how much help he needed and when he needed to do things on his own. Just what we adults like to see — kids surrounded by the community of faith becoming the community of faith. It really can happen!

Easter Eve came, the time for the very special Service of Baptism and Confirmation. All sixty-six confirmands gathered, ready to process into the filled sanctuary. Suddenly Peter's mother appeared with a distressed look on her face. "I'm not quite sure what to do," she said. "Peter is afraid he can't manage his certificate, his candle, and his crutches at the end of the service. He thinks maybe it would be better just to blow out his candle before the recessional."

Before I could even speak, Jay, his partner in the processional, had overheard and whispered, "Don't worry. We'll take care of Peter. We're in this together." The processional hymn began and there was nothing to do but trust. As a matter of fact, the service was so moving that I soon forgot all about Peter or Jay, or what might happen...until the soloist started singing, "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light" and the confirmands filed out of their pews, lit their candles from the Christ candle, and started down the aisle. Peter and Jay met in front of the Christ candle and lit their own candles. Without a word Jay reached over and took Peter's candle. Jay held his own in front of himself, and extended Peter's candle out in front of Peter. The two boys filed out, side by side, candle by candle, walking indeed as children of light.

Yes, baptism does mean that "we're in this together" and that we are called to care for one another. Peter and Jay, perhaps unaware, surrounded me with love and forgiveness that night. You might say, "Love yes! But why forgiveness?"

Why? Because I had forgotten for a moment that our children are also part of the community of faith who surround us with love and forgiveness. That calls for repentance.

Thank you, Children of Light!

From *Alive Now* [July/August 1997]



A PRAYER FROM ONE WHO IS DEAF

O God,
The trouble about being deaf is
That most people find deaf folks a nuisance.

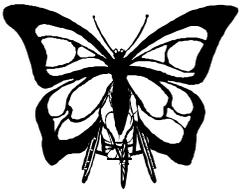
They sympathize with
People who are blind and lame;
But they get irritated and
Annoyed with people who are deaf.
And the result of this is that
Deaf people are apt to avoid company.
And get more lonely.
And more and more shut in.

Give me
Perseverance to not let this trouble get me down.
Don't let it cut me off from others.

And help me to remember, Lord,
Whatever happens,
Nothing can stop me from hearing your voice.

— William Barclay —

From *That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People With Disabilities*, Ann Rose Davie and Ginny Thornburgh, copyright (c) 1992 by the National Organization on Disability [Washington D.C.]



MARIPOSA IN-GATHERING 2001: A TIME TO REACH OUT AND SHARE By Ken Tittle

Many people with disabilities suffer alienation, devaluing prejudice, and painful emotional wounds in our predominantly able-bodied society. Founded over 25 years ago on the California-Mexico border, Mariposa Ministry is a non-profit, peer-based ministry bringing emotional healing and liberation to disabled adults and young people through the sharing of their stories.

Mariposa Ministry is also a "ministry of reconciliation" working to reconcile persons with disabilities to God in Christ and bring them into sharing, supportive community with each other and into full acceptance and inclusion in the church and community.

Over the years Mariposa has ministered at hosting United Methodist churches, been a presence at the California-Pacific Annual Conference, raised up disability advocates within the Conference, supported the Earl Miller Spiritual Life Retreat for Persons with Disabilities, and participated heavily in several Conferences on Prayer and Healing.

Since 1994 Mariposa has been an Internet presence [www.satcom.net/mariposa]. Website visitors and participants in the "Mariposa Online" e-mail group from Canada, the United States, and England have confirmed over and over again that Mariposa is effectively addressing core needs and issues that have rarely been addressed elsewhere.

With the experience of the Imperial Valley (Calif.) and Mexicali (Mexico) Mariposa community behind them and the validation of an international Mariposa fellowship online, two Mariposa counselors, Lola Ruvalcaba and Rosa Medina, have begun working with churches and individuals in the San Diego area to make Mariposa available to persons with disabilities there.

This July the California-Pacific Conference on Prayer and Healing will be accommodating some 20 to 25 persons with disabilities as well as a 15-member youth/young adult "work team" to provide physical and personal care assistance during the con-

ference.

For the first time, a delegation of disabled persons to the Conference on Prayer and Healing will not be exclusively from the Imperial Valley/Mexicali Mariposa fellowship but will include new participants from the San Diego outreach plus outstanding individuals from Canada and across the United States. The week of the Conference (July 8-13) will be followed by activities, meetings, and fellowship in San Diego and in the Imperial Valley/Mexicali area (July 14-18).

For those unfamiliar with disability ministry or the powerful and joyful witness of the Mariposa group, it would be difficult to comprehend the potential of this unprecedented ingathering of persons of faith with physical disabilities — potential not only to change the lives of those participating but also to impact our Annual Conference and the disability communities within San Diego, the Imperial Valley, and Mexicali, and to empower the "Mariposa Online" participants returning to their communities.

Tittle and Lupita Alonso Redondo, co-directors of Mariposa Ministry, were both named California-Pacific Annual Conference Laypersons of the Year in 1997. Tittle's e-mail address is Ken_Tittle@bigfoot.com.

Honor Roll Of Appreciation

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Rev. Loyce McWee	Rev. Nancy Wilson	Dulcie Henwood
California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church		

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*Many of those who would like to participate in the Mariposa In-Gathering have limited financial resources and cannot meet the expenses of transportation, lodging, food, and/or Conference on Prayer and Healing registration fees. If you or your church would like to help someone attend the MIG who might otherwise not be able to do so, please make a check out to the Neighborhood House of Calexico, mark it "Mariposa Ministry," and mail it to Neighborhood House of Calexico, Fourth and Mary, Calexico, CA 92231.*  
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*"A Faithletter For United Methodists With Disabilities
And Those Who Care About Them"*

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