

From Tragedy to Triumph

Joni Eareckson Tada is an amazing example of how tragedy can be turned into triumph. As a teenager who loved riding horses, hiking, tennis and swimming, her life took a sudden departure from her involvement in those outdoor activities.

On a hot summer day in July 1967, while on a beach with some friends, she dove into Chesapeake Bay, not knowing how shallow the water was. She broke her neck – a fracture between the fourth and fifth cervical levels – and became a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down.

Today, she is a Christian author of more than 40 books, radio host and founder of *Joni and Friends*, an organization “accelerating Christian ministry in the disability community.” After the accident, during two years of rehabilitation, Tada learned how to paint with a brush between her teeth, and later began selling her artwork.

Writing in *Decision* magazine, she related: “A large part of me never moves, because I’m paralyzed from the shoulders down. It’s like instant stillness! I don’t run, I sit. I don’t race, I wait.

“My ‘natural’ stillness used to drive me crazy. After my diving injury, I lay still for three months waiting to be moved from the intensive care unit into a regular hospital room. While in rehab, I stayed put in my wheelchair for hours outside physical therapy, and in the evenings my stillness would madden me as I sat by the door waiting for friends or family to come by for a visit. It was more frightening at night when I lay down; at least in my wheelchair I could flail my arms and shrug my shoulders, but in bed I couldn’t move at all except to turn my head on the pillow. My bed was an altar of affliction.



“But time, prayer and study in God’s Word have a way of changing things. Now, many years later, my bed is an altar of praise. It’s the one spot where I always meet God in total, relaxed stillness. In fact, as soon as I wheel into my bedroom and see the side lamp lit, it signals my mind: ‘It’s time to be still and to know more about God ... it’s time to pray.’”

What a remarkable inspiration Tada has become to millions of people, urging all of us to determine to enjoy life to the fullest, no matter what our circumstances may be.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation (Philippians 4:12).

– Beecher Hunter