

## *Real Life Stories*

### *Kristi's Story*

*"I will praise You..."*

A number of years ago, God chose to begin a new life within a fourteen-year-old girl. Certainly, it was a result of her own unwise behavior; but still, in His sovereignty, God decided to bring it about. The baby was born three months earlier than expected, weighing barely two pounds. Her heart and her breathing stopped many times. She survived months of surgeries and other interventions. However, the oxygen needed to keep her alive left her blind and brain-damaged.

This little one required special care that was far beyond the capabilities of a young girl, but she was released from hospital into the care of her birth mother. After 18 months of life-threatening neglect, the baby, Paula, was apprehended by the Children's Aid and placed in an institution for the next four years until a foster home was found.

These early years of neglect and instability took their toll on Paula. She was very confused and emotionally fragile, often biting, scratching, and throwing temper tantrums. She was severely delayed developmentally and was soon discovered to be not only totally blind but also profoundly deaf. She was cut off from everything around her and preoccupied with rocking, hand flapping, and other self-stimulating behaviors.

Her foster family was well-intentioned but was unable to offer Paula the things she needed in order to thrive. The Children's Aid searched unsuccessfully to find another foster home. They had nearly concluded that an institutional setting was best for Paula when they made one final attempt.

#### **Drawn together**

A province away, my husband and I were praying about adopting a visually-impaired child. Rick is an eye doctor who specializes in working with multi-handicapped children. We had no idea how to go about doing adopting a blind child, but faithfully read a weekly newspaper column called Today's Child that featured hard-to-adopt children.

One day, Today's Child featured a beautiful seven-year-old little girl named Melissa, who was both deaf and blind. When we read that article, we knew the Lord was answering our prayers. We wrote a letter, explaining why we wanted to adopt a child like Melissa. We were delighted when we heard from a distant Children's Aid; and soon we were on a plane. Of course, Rick, with his experience, had a fairly realistic understanding of what Melissa would be like, but in my mind, I pictured meeting a "normal" seven year old, who just couldn't see or hear.

The little girl we met was nothing like I had imagined. When we arrived at the foster home, we were told her real name was Paula, as Melissa was a pseudonym for the newspaper. We were led to a small, dark room at the back of the house. Paula sat cross-legged on an inner tube, rocking wildly. She was skin and bone. Her face was black and blue from self-abuse. My heart sank when I saw her, and I felt afraid. I made a feeble attempt to take her little hand and talk to her, but she just kept rocking. I tried to gently give Paula a doll I had made but she quickly pulled her hand away. On the third attempt, she threw it across the room. I looked helplessly at Rick. He quietly came and knelt in front of her and began to hum a little tune. He touched her left big toe, and slowly walked his fingers along her left leg and up to her waist. Paula stopped rocking and waited. He walked his fingers along her left arm to her left shoulder then to her left cheek and then gently tweaked her nose. Instantly, a smile broke out on her face; and she reached out her little arms, grabbed hold of my husband's neck, and hugged her new daddy for the very first time.

#### **A new home**

At first, Paula was fearful of all the changes in her surroundings. She often would curl up in a fetal position on the floor, and sometimes we would notice silent tears. We soon discovered that this happened at the sounds of the washing machine, the electric knife, the vacuum cleaner, and crying babies. That's when we realized that she could hear, even though we had all the test results that showed she could not. She did not understand anything she heard, but the one thing she did understand was love.

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Paula began to blossom before our eyes as she responded to our love for her. Her countenance changed, and the wild rocking and hand-flapping stopped. We never saw the biting, scratching, or reported tantrums. She began to learn language and steadily soaked up understanding of the world around her.

Above all, we wanted her to understand that God loved her so much that He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, to die for her on the cross. He died so that her sin could be forgiven and she could one day go to heaven to live with Jesus forever. These are very hard truths for anyone to comprehend, but God gave Paula understanding of these things far beyond her mental capacity.

We could observe our little girl responding in love to Jesus who loved her. We could see the joy and the peace in her heart as she memorized Scripture verses and sang along with all our Christian music. (Although Paula cannot make up her own sentences, the Lord has given her the ability to memorize.) So we gave her a new name, Paula Kristi Joy—Little Joyful Christian! Today, we call her Kristi.

We didn't know if she would really be able to understand about sin and her need for forgiveness. In fact, it was hard for us to show Kristi that she was a sinner, since she never did anything that we could actually point out as sin. Kristi doesn't exercise a will of her own. She does whatever she is told to do and always needs that prompt in order to act. However, we often find her facing heavenward with a glow and a smile on her face that are indescribable.

#### **Joy in heaven**

One day, Kristi was sitting at the piano with her big sister, Katie, learning to play a little song. Afterwards, Kristi came and sat beside me. Her head was down and she looked troubled. I was shocked when Kristi spoke a few moments later:

“Mommy, did she press a little hard on the piano keys when Katie was teaching her how to play the piano?” Here she was telling me that she was frustrated about her piano playing. I answered Kristi. “I don't know, honey. Did you do that? I didn't notice.”

“Yes, Mommy.” Her head hung even lower. “Mommy, should she pray and tell God she's sorry and ask God to forgive her, and then He can think happy thoughts and she can think happy thoughts?” I answered, “Would you like to do that, Kristi?”

Immediately, she said, “Yes! God? She pressed a little hard on the piano keys when Katie was teaching her how to play the piano. She's very sorry. Would You please forgive her, and then You can think happy thoughts and she can think happy thoughts? Amen.”

Her little face beamed with joy. My eyes filled with tears because I knew she understood God's forgiveness and felt the joy of restored fellowship with Him. This was one of the only times that Kristi has expressed her own thoughts. Two other times we have heard her say, “Let's pray about it,” on occasions when she obviously thought we were a little slow to do that!

Since she has been totally blind from birth, Kristi does not have any concept of what things look like. She suffers seizures. She is very vulnerable and relies on someone else to help her with every basic need, but the Lord has given her confidence to face each new day.

The Lord has taught us much through Kristi. We just can't take our eyes off her. It delights us to anticipate her needs and to give her those things that will help her grow and mature and will bring her happiness.

#### **New life for all**

We know that you are just as precious to God as Kristi is. Born a sinner, spiritually blind and deaf, yet God reached out to you in love, seeking to adopt you as His own special child. If you have trusted Christ, God is thrilled as you continue to respond to Him. If you have not, there is good news; God still longs for you to turn and embrace Him as your heavenly Father for the very first time.

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