



**Doug 1982**

## A Ministry MORE than Ten Years in the Making

As a young boy, my uncle used to take me bass and crappie fishing near Dandridge, Tennessee where I grew up. I loved it with a passion but like many kids, I fished less as I grew older, entered high school and I became more involved in traditional sports like baseball, basketball and football. I was at that age where teenagers believe they are invincible.

However, all that changed in 1983 when I had a diving accident between my sophomore and junior year that left me paralyzed and without the use of my legs and hands. I crushed the disc between my 5th and 6th vertebrae and all the sports I enjoyed not to mention daily activities of living life were gone. It was the first time that I realized I needed God. Not just to forgive me of all the sins I had done or would do in the future but to be my strength in living life with my new disability.

Jesus became my Savior while I was in the Patricia Neal Rehabilitation Center in Knoxville, TN and my new found relationship with the Lord gave me so much joy it was hard for me to doubt or ask why. I just moved forward with the attitude of doing all I could to make the most of my life. Philippians 4:13 became my life verse. ☺ Now that's not to say that I did not struggle or have obstacles to overcome but through it all God was there every step of the way guiding, encouraging and strengthening me. That's the great thing about God: His faithfulness. He continues to work in our hearts and minds drawing us to Him and bringing His good into our lives despite our mistakes and challenges.

After spending 9 months in the hospital I was sent home and eventually went back to school. It was a very scary time for me wondering how I would be received but again God was gracious and surrounded me with great friends and caring faculty. Fellow students would help me go from class to class, share notes and even get my lunch tray. The school also gave me a PE credit for taking physical therapy on site, and I was elected president of our student body my senior year. I eventually graduated from high school and went on to graduate from college and law school. I met and married the most wonderful woman I know (and my best friend), Leanne, in 1991 and later even became VP of a company in Texas. Through it all God was there opening new doors, guiding and blessing beyond what I could ever hope or imagine.

In 1999, Leanne and I bought our first house when we moved to the Dallas/Fort Worth Mid-Cities area for a job and yes, two blocks from our house was a nature center with nine stock ponds.

Unfortunately, I was so busy with my new position that I rarely had time to enjoy this blessing until several years later when I started my own consulting firm and began to work from home. This gave me the daily opportunity to go out and wet a line either early in the morning or late in the evening. Looking back I can definitely see God's hand working as there was such little effort needed for me to go out and figure out through trial and error how to do what I knew in my head with my disabled body. Again, God was gracious in helping me rediscover something I truly loved to do growing up.



**Doug and Leanne 1999**

Since then I've learned how to rig all my own tackle and release fish back into the water on my own. I've fished against able bodied anglers in tournaments and even won some awards and money fishing but my biggest accomplishments have been the new things I learned how to do through trial and error that I never thought were possible. It makes me smile to think that with God all things are possible.

However, our story does not end there as God always has bigger and better plans on the horizon for us as believers and little did I know fishing was only a small part of the coming season of our life. You see while consulting and working from home, Leanne and I also got involved in a local disability ministry and joined the board of the Dallas/Fort Worth area Joni and Friends ministry in 2005. Soon afterwards, we were invited to attend and help with the fishing activities at our first Family Retreat hosted by the field office. We were excited thinking we had so much experience and wisdom to share but as usual God turned things all around on us at camp and changed the direction of our lives.



**Doug and Leanne 2010**

You see, up to this point in my life I had rarely been around others with disabilities since leaving rehab in 1984. I had been mainstreamed through my education and job so that the only time the topic of disability came up was when a colleague would see someone else using a wheelchair and ask if I knew them as a joke (like we were all in a club ☺). In turn, I was not sure what to expect at the Family Retreat. However, once we arrived the sense of God's presence overwhelmed me to the point it felt like a small piece of heaven on earth.