



THE HOPE IN GRIEF

By Tara Kelley, H*VMI Director of Disability Ministries

Debra was born with Down Syndrome in 1963. At that time, it was common for children with a disability to be placed in residential facilities. In 1966, Debra, at the age of three, went to live at the newly founded "Home for Retarded Children" (now Melmark) in Berwyn, PA. Back in the 80's, several Melmark residents were invited to attend Handi*Camp. Debra was one of them! Her favorite things included M&Ms, chocolate chip cookie bars and Mountain Dew—but she always counteracted those treats by asking for decaf tea and sugar-free pancake syrup! Debra had an award-winning smile, mischievous giggle, and a remarkable memory, always knowing the exact date of when she would be back at Handi*Camp next year. She was also "too smart for her own good." We heard that, on one Sunday, it was evident that she had taken money from the offering plate at church. When asked about the incident, she said, "I was just making change."

Challenges aside, what stood out most was Debra's *deep* love and *personal* faith in Jesus. Debra loved to hear Bible stories, enjoyed going to church, faithfully attended H*VMI's Melmark Bible club, and never missed a summer of Handi*Camp. She loved to memorize *long* Bible verses and then recite them to everyone she met. She was never shy in speaking about her "Best Friend, Jesus!" When someone was dressed in costume as "Jesus," acting out our Bible stories, Debra would go into the audience and drag someone up front saying, "I want you to meet my Friend, Jesus!" When we would start to share the Gospel, Debra would pipe up so SHE could tell the story. She knew it all—starting with God's love in sending His Son, right through the Second Coming and someday being able to live with Jesus in heaven forever!

On January 25th, Debra experienced the end of that message. She went Home to live with Jesus! To friends and family left behind, Debra would say, "Awww... it's OK. It's beautiful here." Her attitude was, "Why worry?" Debra knew for a fact that those who accepted Jesus as Savior would someday see Him and enjoy a reunion in heaven! A long-time friend of H*VMI told us that she shared with Debra's mom: "If Debra were here, she would be writing you a beautiful letter of comfort. She would tell you that everything will be OK and not to be sad because Jesus took her to Heaven. She would draw you pictures and include a colored page or two from her coloring book. How do I know what she would do? For over twenty years, Debra participated in almost every memorial service I ever led at Melmark. From the podium at the front of the gym, Debra would reminisce about her friend. Then she would go into the audience and hug each family member, while handing them her letter. If a family was unable to attend the Melmark



service, Debra would come to me later and ask me to mail her letter. ...Debra had a huge heart full of love and compassion; she cared deeply about others."

Many might look at Debra and see, "Down Syndrome. Intellectually Disabled." But that was not the *real* Debra. She was a beautiful woman who loved the Lord with all her heart, soul, mind and strength. She knew "grief" and the "grief journey" better than many. At Debra's memorial service, people shared these remarks: "Debra was the chair and sole member of the Melmark Bereavement Committee." "Her ministry was very special." "Challenges and problems didn't stop her."

Because Debra knew that we "**...do not grieve like others who have no hope,**" (1 Thessalonians 4:13) she chose to use her simple, loving ways to convey that Hope to others. Her service concluded with this thought: "We are all builders for eternity. We can either be a stumbling block or a stepping stone." Debra was a faithful servant of her heavenly Father. She *truly* was a stepping stone!

As H*VMI walks alongside individuals and families who are grieving or affected by disability, we desire to be stepping stones like Debra. Would you consider joining us? Your prayers and/or financial support helps to sustain H*VMI as a builder for eternity. **Thank you!**

Follow prayer needs at: hvmi.org/pray

Give now at: hvmi.org/donate.



I/we would like join with H*VMI in being builders for eternity!

GIVE ONLINE at: hvmi.org/donate OR MAIL TO: H*VMI, PO Box 122, Akron PA 17501. (Thank you for providing an envelope.)

Please PRINT your contact information below.

▲ Name

▲ Street or PO Box

▲ City

▲ State ▲ Zip

▲ Phone #

▲ Email address

This is updated contact information. I prefer to receive H*VMI mailings by email.

I/we would like to help H*VMI through a financial gift of: \$ _____.

Method of Payment: Cash Check (Please make checks payable to H*VMI.)

Credit Card #: _____ CVV: _____

Exp. Date: _____ / _____ Visa MasterCard Discover AmExpress

Name as it appears on card: _____

Signature: _____



Enhancing Trust



H*VMI MINISTRY CENTER



- Land Development Plan Submission
- Land Development Plan Approval
Praying for approval in time for a spring/summer ground breaking! (Date TBD.)
 - First round comments processed and returned.
 - Second round comments processed and returned.
- Highway Occupancy and NPDES Permits processed by state and local officials.
- Construction
Beginning with major grading and site work, followed by buildings and other plan features.

The Board and Staff of H*VMI is so excited to see building begin in the coming months. We have faced many challenges and will likely face more as the building begins. But, we know God will provide. We are grateful to those who returned the "How Can You Help?" Connection Form! We have made many great contacts through that. Please keep them coming! If you have a church group that wishes to volunteer or a business you think could assist with the project, let us know. If you missed that form and would like one, contact the H*VMI office.

We are continuing to seek funds for the build-out, and we would appreciate your prayers as that process ramps up. Details about fundraising and the groundbreaking will be coming to you in the near future. **Thank you!**

▲ OPEN HERE ▲



UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit hvmi.org/upcoming-events or call our office at 717.859.4777 for details or to RSVP.

- May 1 **BASIS Breakfast** (for bereaved parents), Yoder's, New Holland PA
- June–August **Handi*Camp Day Camp and Lessons on the Lawn**, Lancaster County PA
- August 7 **Handi*Camp, PIP and Bible Club Picnic**, Akron PA
- August 21 **BASIS Picnic**, Akron PA
- September 14 **H*VMI Annual Charity Golf Outing**, Tanglewood Manor Golf Club, Quarryville PA
- October 2 **H*VMI Chicken BBQ and Fall Fun Family Event**, Akron PA
- October 8–9 **H*VMI Annual Ministry Yard Sale**, Akron PA
- October 29 **Lancaster County Area Ministry Luncheon**, Shady Maple, East Earl PA

PRAYER

- **PRAISE** the Lord for the support groups and Bible clubs that were able to resume after being on hiatus since March 2020!
- **PRAY** for God to provide all the staff needed for Handi*Camp this summer.
- **PRAY** for ongoing work to obtain approvals and permits so we can begin building on the property!

