

The **joni&friends** (<https://www.joniandfriends.org>) **Family Retreat** at Maranatha Bible Camp, Maxwell, Nebraska, 9-13 August 2021. (by Dr. Ed Holroyd)

Their ministries web page proclaims for the numerous Family Retreat programs across the country:

“A Little Slice of Heaven...”

Family Retreats offer a safe and accepting Christ-centered environment for individuals affected by disability and their families making it a little slice of heaven for everyone! At Family Retreat, families are cared for, encouraged, and rejuvenated in an accessible camp environment. Each Family Retreat provides inclusive worship, Bible-based teaching, age-appropriate fun activities, and cultivates meaningful connections with other families. A loving and trained volunteer will attend activities with each camper while parents and caregivers attend programming worry free! Each Family Retreat is packed with exciting adventures for the whole family.”



Maxwell is the first town east of North Platte, Nebraska. Just west of the Interstate-80 exit for Maxwell is the Maranatha Bible Camp, with a large white cross beside the highway. The camp environment is in a large grove of cedar trees and includes a large pond. The angled building is a gym and auditorium. The large straight building has a dining center at its north end and partitionable rooms at its center and other end for activities. Numerous cabins are scattered among the trees. A swimming pool is adjacent to the waterfront. At the west end is a zip line and archery area.

After our church service and adult Sunday school in Arvada, Colorado, my wife and I stopped at the end of the G-line railroad stop near our home to pick up Jay White (from Boston). I had a quick lunch. Then Jay and I road in my van along Interstate routes 76 and 80 for the 4-hour trip to the camp. Dinner was a Runza restaurant in North Platte. The flight bringing Angela and Wendy from LAX and DEN was late in North Platte. We unexpectedly picked up a young Bangladesh woman graduate from Perdue who was to have a job interview in Ogallala the next day. She was unable to get transportation to her hotel there and could not stay at the airport overnight. So we took her to our camp and then to Ogallala the next morning.

Our team of volunteers was given training Monday morning. Most were assigned to become friends with particular persons with disabilities (“campers”) for the activities through Friday. My main task was to take photos and videos for our memories. For this report, some of the illustrations are screen captures of action shots from videos. We were given a tour of the camp facilities.



After lunch our team made welcoming signs for each arriving family and greeted the cars individually before they stopped at the camp entrance in the early afternoon.

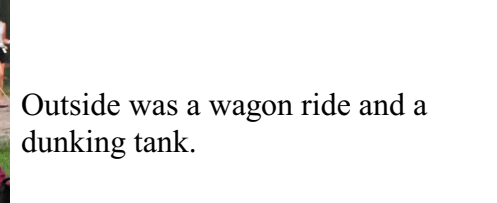
In the photos of the first day we volunteers had black T-shirts and the family guests usually wore maroon (burgundy). We got acquainted and played games until dinnertime.



Each worship time Ellie Powers sang songs of encouragement with her excellent voice. Many of us paraded around the room making sounds with various simple instruments, after the manner of Psalm 150.



After individual family photos and a big group photo we went to the popular Sweet Shop for games and refreshments.



Outside was a wagon ride and a dunking tank.



Tuesday morning, after breakfast, Ellie again lead a worship session. Then the younger people and their volunteer partners left for a teaching session by Bethany, followed by crafts and activities in the gym. The parents stayed for a group sharing session lead by pastor Luke Veldt, whose daughter was one of our campers.

