



## Greetings in Christ from Isaiah's Place!

Under a starry night at Isaiah's Place, it is easy for our imagination of the first Christmas to come alive. Above our stables, we can imagine a bright star shining down on God's precious Son in the arms of Mary. In the gentle gait of horses, we remember the friendly animals around the Holy Family surrounded by shepherds and the three wise men. Songs of rejoicing angels can be heard in the winter air. Yet, in the lives of those who visit Isaiah's Place we see, not imagine, the Christmas spirit at work all year long.

The story of Isaiah's Place began at a National Baptist Conference for the Deaf, where Diane Frederickson met two beautiful angels. Deaf, these two young girls touched her heart deeply. In asking God what to do with and for Deaf people, Diane sensed God saying, "Go and find a place for many Deaf people". This place became Isaiah's Place, the only Deaf retreat center in Texas. Near the geographic heart of Texas, Isaiah's Place sits on 40 peaceful acres with an outdoor chapel, stables, horses, a log cabin with a kitchen, bunk house, and a tire swing.

Since 2002, Isaiah's Place has been serving the Lord by reaching out to Deaf people and their hearing friends. Such programs include: American Sign Language (ASL) classes, horsemanship, Bible Study retreats, cowgirl activities, Vacation Bible School, ASL Drama and Music Programs and much, much more.

These programs are to help reverse a startling and sad statistic: nearly ninety-eight percent of Deaf people do NOT have a church home or know Christ. Deaf people experience communication barriers in churches. Deaf are often isolated in small towns or in city apartments. Lack of qualified interpreters, lack of signing pastors, and attitudes that look down on Deaf people's capabilities are just a few of the barriers that Deaf people experience in churches. Through Isaiah's Place, churches can have a partner to help the Deaf see the Good News in their language and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Before I share a personal story about Isaiah's Place, I want to introduce myself. My name is Mary Kay Hudspeth, and I am a friend of Isaiah's Place. I am a mother of two children, and wife of Tom Hudspeth, pastor for the Deaf at Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas. My daughter is 14 and hearing, and my son is 10 and deaf. I am hard of hearing/Deaf and use American Sign Language. For the past three years I was a teacher at the Lovers Lane Academy for the Deaf.

A few years ago, I came to Isaiah's Place with a group of Deaf high school students. One girl, Susan\*, had minimum language skills. She was often angry, and her self esteem was very low. Her family did not use sign language, so there was deep isolation at home. Our church group took these students to Isaiah's Place to learn how to ride horses and to take care of them. When Susan first set eyes on the beauty of a white horse, she began to smile and laugh. Her angry shell dissolved as she thought about getting on that horse. With a wide smile on her face, Susan stroked the horse's neck, overcoming her nervousness being near such a big animal. I was amazed to see this gentle and happy Susan. After riding her horse, she giggled the rest of the day and continued to smile long after she returned home.



Several months later, we took our group to a retreat center in Alabama. This would be Susan's first trip out of state. To explain where we were going, I showed Susan maps and pictures and she seemed to be excited about this trip. Yet, when we arrived at the retreat center, a huge frown crossed Susan's face and began to act out angrily. I couldn't understand what had happened.

Crying and looking somewhere towards the distance, she signed repeatedly, "white horse". It was then I realized, "Ohhhh, she thought we were going to Isaiah's Place." I recalled that whenever I had used the sign "trip", it was associated with going to Isaiah's Place. Because Susan had not been on a trip before, she remembered the sign "trip" with what happened at Isaiah's Place: riding a white horse. For a teenager who hadn't had others explain "trip" to her, the experience of Isaiah's Place was such that the sign for "trip" could have only one meaning.



I then realized something else Susan had experienced at Isaiah's Place: God's grace. Riding a horse brought her out of her hardened, language deficit shell, and set her on a trail toward learning the true meaning of God's love. At Isaiah's Place, her visual vocabulary grew, which raised her self esteem, so opening herself to receive love from those who do love her. Watching Susan's face change at Isaiah's Place touched me deeply, and it took a trip to Alabama to know that Susan loved Isaiah's Place.

In this season of Christ's birth we look for gifts to make our loved ones merrier, to touch family, friends, and even strangers with the Christmas spirit. Many gifts and prayers are needed as we look to celebrate ten years at Isaiah's Place in 2012. I invite you to give a gift to Isaiah's Place, for here we give Deaf people and their hearing friends a place to imagine and to experience God's love in Christ.

Blessings, Mary Kay Hudspeth

Diane Frederickson, Director, Isaiah's Place

*\*Not her real name.*

For more information on Isaiah's Place, go on web page at [www.isaiahsplace.org](http://www.isaiahsplace.org) To donate to Isaiah's Place or sign up for volunteer opportunities, please contact Diane at [254-694-7771](tel:254-694-7771) cell, or [254-205-7880](tel:254-205-7880) text, or send an email to [diane@isaiahsplace.org](mailto:diane@isaiahsplace.org). I've enclosed a self addressed envelope to make it easier for you. If you know anyone who is deaf or has a heart for the deaf people, please share this with them. Isaiah's Place is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and any donation is tax deductible. Hope to see you!

