

September 2011



Robin Morris runs our holidays for single parent families

Dear Friend

I'm busy unpacking. Some of my items might surprise you, given that I have just embarked on my 70th year! Two single blade canoe paddles, a rather specialised sheath knife for bush craft, first aid kit, compass and day sack... and very importantly, the lists of all the single parent families with whom my wife Cathy and I have spent the summer weeks.

Wow, look at my mum go!

I have so many memories as I unpack. In my mind's eye I see and hear the mums screaming as they whistle down the zip wire at tree top height, with their offspring looking on with a mixture of pride and embarrassment! One eleven year old daughter watching her mum scale a vertical rock face is heard to utter in sheer amazement, "Wow, look at my mum go!" She will never again see her mum in quite the same light!

So many memories as we look back over the 20 years since we held the first Take a Break holiday – and many hundreds have followed. I'm writing now to ask you to keep supporting these 'life changing' weeks. For amongst the many, many blessed memories I find myself reflecting on Reuben – was it last year or two years ago maybe? Just seven years of age and suffering from autism, he arrived thinking he couldn't do anything, and whilst his older brother's and sister's eyes scanned the list of activities on the notice board, his were full of apprehension tinged with fear. "Just have a go Reuben," said his mum, "I'll be with you and they will help you". 'They' were the qualified outdoor instructors who at the end of every week are commended for their



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patience and understanding. I remember going along to see how Reuben was coping on that first day in the outdoors and was relieved to find that he was surprising both himself and his mum. This little boy, in his short life, had known what it was like to battle with cancer and come through!

As the week progressed, apprehension gave way to anticipation as he began to look forward to what was coming next. Normally he was never still but always on the go and often agitated. And so, I was surprised on that Thursday morning as I walked towards the crate stack. Reuben was sat watching his friend George, a fellow autism sufferer, carefully placing one more upturned crate on top of another as he climbed even higher. Mum was sat enthralled watching. Time passed and still Reuben sat on his crate happily watching his friend's progress – sometimes calling out a word or two of encouragement. His mum became aware of me standing behind her and turning slightly she said, "He's never sat still for so long in his whole life, it's a miracle!"



"He's at peace with himself," I replied. "Yes," she said, "I think that must be it," and then emotion overcame her and she dissolved into tears.

I can do anything!

Every holiday has an inbuilt crisis – it comes to an end! As we gathered together in the lounge on the last evening reflecting on our week of fun and adventures, one little boy who had set out not believing he could do anything suddenly declared with hands raised in sheer exuberance, "I can do anything!"

"Many families turn up on these breaks broken and exhausted by what life has thrown at them."

I will never forget Reuben, nor indeed the many families who turn up on these breaks broken and exhausted by what life has thrown at them. Diane, Reuben's mum, has given me permission to share the enclosed photo and card that she sent us after the holiday, telling us what it meant to her and Reuben.

Helping families most in need

So many happy memories over so many years. And so why, as I unpack, is my happiness tinged with sadness? It's because this was our last summer heading up the Take a Break holidays. We feel it's appropriate to pass on the baton before the youngsters begin to put us in the 'great-grandparent' bracket! But we step down with the confidence that comes from knowing that Care for the Family's commitment to this programme is undiminished – quite simply, it helps so many families. We are

passing on the baton to other capable colleagues who share our passion to see many more 'Reubens' and their families blessed in the coming years.

Together we can change lives

But we couldn't do any of this if it weren't for you. Last year I received a card from an 82 year old lady in Scotland. She explained how she had been about to set out on holiday when illness overtook her and she was unable to go. "This," she wrote, "is my holiday money. Please use it to enable a single parent family to have a break."

As I look back, many happy faces flood into my mind. And yet behind them all are faces I have never seen, the faces of those whose generous gifts have made it possible. 'My' Scottish lady is one of them. Each break is subsidised, as many of the families that come are on very low incomes. In many situations we also need to find an extra bursary to make *any* holiday possible – in the case of a mum with two children an extra £189 would need to be found. Currently, we need to raise £85,000 to cover the cost of the Take a Break initiative. And so as we retire, may I thank you from the bottom of my heart if you have been able to support our work with families. I wish I could have taken you in my suitcase to see for yourselves the impact these breaks have – but you wouldn't fit in! In the meantime please give what you can; it makes such a difference to families like Reuben's.

Sincerely yours



Robin Morris
Holiday Projects Manager

P.S. Please do take the time to read Diane's card and what this break meant to her and Reuben – if you could help I would be eternally grateful.