

TOGETHER WE CAN SEE THE WORLD

*“The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page.” St Augustine*

Special Journeys is a company dedicated to taking individuals with disabilities on vacations. We believe in living our lives to the fullest and pursuing opportunities that will enrich our lives. Now in our 18<sup>th</sup> year, we have certainly met some wonderful people and have some powerful stories to share!

Years ago, we had a group on the General Jackson Showboat in Nashville, TN. After the luncheon and show we were free to walk around and enjoy the scenery. One of our travelers, Eric, is a young man with Down’s Syndrome. He and I were talking about the trip. I was impressed with his observations and comments. He knew a lot and it was an enjoyable conversation. At one point he said to me, “you know what I like best about Special Journeys? You just show up and love. I know you are Christians by how you treat us not by what you say.” It was a beautiful comment and I still cherish it because sometimes society has this idea that people with disabilities fit a certain mold. Eric certainly did not!

Another man named Henry traveled with us on a trip to Chattanooga. He was a quiet gentleman who preferred to sit in the back of the bus not interacting very much with the other travelers. During the trip, our staff decided to see what would happen if they got him more involved. They asked him to assist in asking other travelers where they wanted to eat. He also asked others what they thought about various subjects and even helped with a joke or two. Upon his return home, his agency staff called to ask what happened on his trip. Apparently, he had been chatty ever since he went home! His staff could not believe how different he was since his vacation. The power of a caring community!

The greatest part of traveling with Special Journeys is not where we travel to, but touching lives simply with our smiles and compassion. One of our bus drivers once shared with me that “Driving for Special Journeys was one of the most fulfilling and inspiring missions he could ever do.” I treasure this comment because it strengthens my own beliefs when serving people with disabilities. We are a community of people who not only learn from one another but also impact the lives of those we encounter on our trips.

On a bus trip, we stopped at an IHOP for dinner. A young lady serving our group did an excellent job. Afterwards she came to our bus to share how taking care of our group was healing for her. There were people at her church who are special needs and she was afraid to approach them because she didn’t know how to, and she felt bad about it. She said her time with us put her at ease, and now she was going to reach out to them that following Sunday.

Our vacations are staffed by volunteers. They come to enjoy a trip and serve others, and they end up having a unique, often life-changing experience. All of the volunteer's travel expenses are covered (except snacks and souvenirs). If you are interested in serving as a volunteer with us, please log on to [specialjourneys.org](http://specialjourneys.org) or give us call at 402-884-1014. Consider joining us in our mission of showing the world the great gift God has given us through people with disabilities!

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Lexi and Tom Mann are members of St Wenceslaus Catholic Church in Omaha. They are two time winners of the Tom & Rita Gradoville Award given by Nebraskans Embracing Life for their work in honoring the dignity of life.