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**MISSION STATEMENT**

FOCUS offers emotional, informational, and physical support to families of children with disabilities or with ongoing medical conditions through a variety of programs such as support groups, respite care, and summer day camps. FOCUS networks parents who share common experiences and information with each other, providing a sense of community to families with children with disabilities.

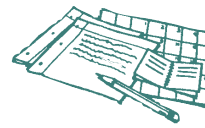
**SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION**

For subscription information, please call FOCUS at (770) 234-9111 or visit our website at [www.focus-ga.org](http://www.focus-ga.org). Annual subscriptions to the newsletter are \$15 for families (waived if necessary) and \$30 for professionals.

## Volunteers Needed!

We need 6 volunteers to assist at Under the Stars on Friday, August 17 from 3 to 9 p.m. at Camp Twin Lakes in Rutledge, GA. Volunteers will unload and transport luggage via golf cart from cars to cabins. It's a fun job!! (Must be over 18 to drive the cart!)

Do you have website experience? We need just a little expertise and training as we update our website. Spend a few hours at FOCUS – we'll feed you!



## From the Editor

by Lucy Cusick

If you are looking for some tidbit of inspiration, I'm not sure my column is the right place to look in this newsletter. You need to read no further than the Hammett's story to be inspired!

I tend to be inspired after being in the car, alone for a few minutes. In the summer, I spend more time in the car than usual, driving to various locations of Camp Hollywood. Now, I don't mind telling you that Camp Hollywood is a logistical nightmare ... we operate two locations of camp for 5 weeks. That means double the staff, double the volunteers, double the campers, double the supplies, double the things that could go wrong! Of course, it also means double the fun, double the laughter, and double hugs for all!!! Anyway, as I drive in the summer, I often wonder why we do what we do ... why did FOCUS ever go into the camp business ... or the respite business ... or the business of offering programs for kids with special needs?

Well ... I'd be a lousy executive director if I didn't have a good answer for that. (No comments, please.) We offer programs because that's what families told us they needed. There is so much that parents must do themselves ... we can listen and comfort and offer advice; but we can't actually live their lives. The parents are ultimately the ones who have to go home and make life work. Professionals, friends, family, and even FOCUS can offer suggestions, but the parents must take the pieces of this new life and put them together to make the best life possible for the family. And that takes energy, patience and stamina!

We offer these programs so parents can enjoy a little break from their children and so children can enjoy a little break from their parents. We at FOCUS know that being the parent of a child with special needs takes extra – extra energy, extra patience, and extra time. Parents feed, dress, drive, play, do therapy, bathe, discipline, and comfort their children for many, many years. Parents do this ... and more; they are often their child's playmate and best friend. At Camp Hollywood, children make friends and enjoy one week of just plain fun; parents enjoy a week of work, errands or chores ... alone! We hope that our programs make your lives just a little easier – and a lot more fun! ■

# Thank You

Many thanks for all contributions to FOCUS. We work diligently to use all contributions to help families of children with disabilities or ongoing medical needs.

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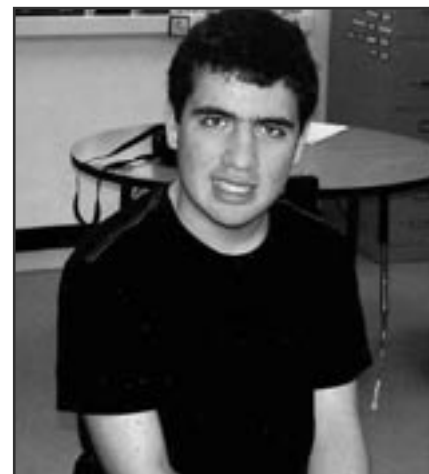
# A Day To Remember

By Diane Mohammadioun

Not long ago, while on a rare, fun trip for a few short days, I walked into a shop to look around. A clerk, perhaps the owner, told me to let her know if I needed any help. As I often do, I looked at her and thought how lucky she was to work, to have her own life around people; this is what I should be doing at this stage of my life. She seemed to be quiet, so I did not plan to strike up a conversation with her, but took the chance. She told me about her son, a very successful doctor, and her husband, a retired golf pro. She herself retired from a very important career; I had no idea that she could relate to my situation. What would this woman know of pain and sacrifice and sorrow; her life seemed so sheltered and she appeared so successful and happy. But I took a chance and told her about my son with autism ... and she simply turned around and softly said, "You have a Gift." She seemed to have some knowledge of my feelings and experiences and had such a sweet spirit. She then told

me about her son with special needs. She told me softly that when you have children, you will have pain, sorrow and joy. Her words were so comforting.

I'm so glad that I took the chance that day and spoke with this woman. I received an unexpected gift from this woman who I never in a million years thought would understand my situation. I will always remember that wonderful day. ■



FOCUS is a nonprofit organization that provides emotional, informational and physical support to families of children with disabilities or ongoing medical conditions.

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# FOCUS

Volume 24, Number 4

July/August 2007

## The Hammett Family

By Judy Hammett

Some of you reading this will know us from the annual FOCUS fashion shows. Our children model each year with their favorite doctors. We love showing off our beautiful children, thanking their devoted doctors, and sharing the story of our unusual family.

When we began our journey of fostering children, we never thought we would adopt...not at our age. But God had other plans for us, plans for fostering and loving. I have fostered 43 children; Ken and I married in 1994 and we have fostered 21 children together. We began fostering medically fragile children in 1995. Some call us 'the couple who takes the children no one else can handle.' Perhaps that is true in some way. Infants come and go through our home and each leaves in better health than they arrived. We take no credit for this; we just know that LOVE goes a long way in the healing process.



Shawnee, now 10 years old, was a 21-ounce, 23-week premie who needed oxygen, a feeding tube and a heart monitor. Today, the only equipment he uses is a wheel chair and a gait trainer. He even propels his own chair. We adopted Shawnee in 2001.

Kimberly was so fragile that the wonderful doctors who loved and cared for her at Grady Hospital did not think she would live to leave the hospital. She did leave....with us! Even then we were asked to accept another baby that had a better chance of survival since there was no way she would live more than a few months. We were committed to Kimberly; I fell in love with her at first sight. We brought her home to live....not to die. She has been very sick, and we almost lost her twice. But she bounces back – she has the biggest smile and is the happiest child I have ever seen. In her 9 years, I have heard her cry maybe a dozen times. We adopted Kimberly in 2001 – I cannot believe she is now 9 years old.

Kenya came into the world at 23 weeks weighing 22 ounces. At 10, she still requires oxygen full time, has a tracheostomy, G and J feeding tubes and is dependent on her wheelchair. But she is 10 and lets us all know when she is happy or miserable and is quite the little clown. I sometimes refer to her as the next Houdini because of the positions she gets herself into. We adopted Kenya in 2003.

Our littlest angel, Kiley, is now truly an angel. We finalized her adoption in October 2006; she modeled in the FOCUS fashion show with Dr. David Wrubel, her neurosurgeon in November. In December, she traded her wheelchair for angel wings and is now running and playing in heaven.

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[www.focus-ga.org](http://www.focus-ga.org) for information  
and upcoming events!

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*The Hammett Family*  
(Continued from front page)

And now we have a new angel in our home. We are planning to adopt him but cannot call him by name until it is final; he has a trach, is on oxygen, fed through a tube, has hydrocephalus, microcephaly, CP, seizures and is wheelchair dependent. And he fits right into this family!!

We have witnessed so many miracles. No one believed Kimberly would ever be able to stand. Well, some of you saw her in her gait trainer in the fashion show. Granted, she needs support to drag those little feet forward but she did it! She has a first place blue ribbon from the DeKalb County Special Olympics to prove it.

Each morning they awake with smiles and laughter; Kimberly even sings. She is certainly a morning person! The three older ones are always ready for school, anxious for the school bus to arrive. There is no way we can meet the day without a smile and laugh when we live with these little rays of sunshine.

People ask us all the time how we can do what we do. How we could actually choose to do this when we could be spending our retirement years enjoying life and traveling. We tell them we do enjoy life and we do travel...we just do it with 3, 4 or 5 children!

Traveling with at least 4 wheel chairs is not easy, but it can be done, and we do it all the time! We travel in a 38-foot motor home and pull a 12-foot trailer. The trailer carries extra oxygen tanks (we have 2 concentrators in the RV), cases of diapers, wipes, formula, food, bath chair and supplies, and decorations if we will be camping during the holidays. We spend Christmas in Disney World in the Campground, and our site is covered with Christmas Disney Blow Ups, decorated trees and stockings. Before leaving for any trip we check to be sure we have everyone's medications for the trip. If we know we will need refills, we locate a CVS near where we are staying. We have names of physicians in several areas of the country in the event of an emergency.

We named our RV the "The Hammett's Rx 3" because we have had two other RVs before this one. We hope to one day afford a motor home with three slideouts since Shawnee can now commando crawl and needs more floor space and since our "babies" are growing up.

We have made several changes in our home to accommodate the wheelchairs and make life a little easier on our children and us. We removed all the carpet and put in wood floors, added a stair lift to the second floor and

converted a half bath downstairs to a full size handicap accessible bathroom. Now our dream and current project is to raise enough money to have a large downstairs room converted into two bedrooms so the girls will be on the main floor near the new bathroom. It is becoming more and more difficult for us to lift them from their chairs, to the bath chairs, back to their chairs, then to the stair lift and then to their beds. And neither of the girls can sit in the stair lift without assistance ... so we sit them in the chair and walk along with the lift while holding them in the chair.

We know we are different from most FOCUS families as we did not give birth to these children ... we chose them (or they chose us!) and we knew from day one what the future would be for us. We knew that we would be giving meds, changing diapers, pushing wheelchairs and sitting beside hospital beds for the rest of our lives. We would be lifting adults one day and not babies. And it is the life we have been blessed with. I often think I need them as much, if not more, than they need me.

I have the poem called *Welcome to Holland*. I guess Ken and I are the couple who actually bought tickets to Holland!! And we love where we are. We would be no where else.

We believe in the future of these children. Whatever time they have, they will live as normal a life as we can provide for them. Every time one of them smiles, says mama or daddy, asks for oatmeal (Shawnee's favorite food), takes a step in the gait trainer, sings a song (even when we do not understand the words), or looks at me and says "I need a hug" and then throws his arms around me ... I believe in them.

Do we get tired? Oh yes. This is a 24 hour, 7 day a week job. We have no nursing help ... it is the two of us to care for 4 (or 5 or 6) and we love what we do. Some nights I get no sleep, but I thank God that I need less sleep than most people. And when they look at me and smile or reach for my hand, I am wide awake and no longer need sleep.

God blessed us with these children, and we look forward to many more blessings from Him in the form of special little Angels. We do not know why He selected us to care for His most special, precious little ones, but we are so thankful He feels we are worthy of these gifts.

Often people ask us why do we do this? How can we do this? The answer is simple..."How can we not do it". ■

## Coming Up!

Visit our website at [www.focus-ga.org](http://www.focus-ga.org) for information and upcoming events.

### **Under the Stars: A Family Fun Weekend**



★ August 17 – 19, FOCUS families will blast off Under the Stars at Camp Twin Lakes for a weekend of family fun! The theme this year is “FOCUS Is A Blast!” We do have a waiting list for the weekend, but if you would like to be on that list for last minute cancellations, please give us a call!

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Extreme Home Modification Tour**

Saturday, September 15

10 am to 1 pm

Locations to be announced!

Have you considered making changes to your home to allow your child with disabilities better access? Tour the homes of FOCUS families who have made changes (or built entire houses!) to make their homes more accessible. To offer your home for the tour, please call or email Angie at [angie@focus-ga.org](mailto:angie@focus-ga.org). More about the tour in the next newsletter!

### **8<sup>th</sup> Annual FOCUS Fashion Show**

Calling all models!! This annual fashion show not only highlights the latest in clothing styles, it stars the most beautiful models in all of Atlanta!! This event helps raise awareness for FOCUS and highlights the beauty and gifts of all children. Call FOCUS if you would like more information about modeling in the show!

### **Mom's Day Off!**

We'll enjoy Mom's Day on the Houseboat in September – check the website for the date!



## Looking Back!

*The 4<sup>th</sup> annual FOCUS Six Flags Day dawned sunny and bright, for the first year ever!!! Families enjoyed a wonderful day of roller coasters and Looney Tunes, plus a delicious lunch at the Peachtree Pavilion! Thanks to the sponsors of our fund raisers and to Coca Cola for sponsoring this big event!*

