

## Thank you for restoring an entire family. Family Spotlight: The Gray-Jones Family



*Steven (left), Joe and Ackie are lifted up by Jill's House, allowing them carefree moments.*

Ackie Jones is raising a child with special needs, recently remarried, balances her many responsibilities as a division director for Customs and Border Protection and continues to mourn the loss of her son, David. "I am thankful for the services Jill's House offers me and our entire family," said Ackie. "Serving the family unit is a huge gap in the disability community that has just not been filled, until now."

Ackie's son, Joe Gray, 17, has autism. "Any time Joe gets a chance to be part of Jill's House, he's in!" said Ackie. "And frankly, so am I." Ackie, who is divorced from Joe's dad, remarried in February. Her husband, Clyde, who has no biological children, became an instant partner in parenting with Ackie and her former husband, Aaron. He is an additional father figure to a son with special needs who requires a lot of extra attention. "Clyde and I participated in your marriage conference earlier this year," continued Ackie, "and it really helped us connect and focus on building a strong foundation for our new marriage and family. We have also participated in Jill's House's Bible studies, which help keep our faith strong and connect us with other Jill's House families."



*Joe danced the night away at the 2014 Jill's House Joy Prom.*

**"We are so thankful for the way you love and appreciate Joe, and take care of our family as a whole. You help our family stay strong and enjoy life."**

**-Ackie Jones**

Joe has a typically developing brother, Steven, 13, who has joined Joe at Jill's House for an overnight stay, giving their parents a complete and total break. After his stay at Jill's House, Steven said, "Jill's House is more fun than anywhere else." "Getting that stamp of approval from Steven says a lot," said Ackie. "When you think of places designed for people or children with special needs, the word 'institutional' comes to mind. Jill's House couldn't be further from that. It's warm, welcoming and really does celebrate, not just accommodate, kids

with special needs."

Ackie's other son, David, passed away at 10 years of age when Joe was just seven. Born 10 weeks premature, David had multiple physical disabilities and passed in his sleep while Joe was at school. "In my deep grief, my biggest concern was Joe," said Ackie. During that time, Ackie had a difficult time getting in touch with her emotions. That is, until Joe helped her heal. "One day Joe said, 'I didn't get to say goodbye to David,'" said Ackie. "And it hit me! That was what I was missing. David died in his sleep, and I didn't get to tell him how much I loved him when he passed. That feeling of incompleteness was tearing at my heart, but I couldn't figure out what it was until Joe helped me see. The questions Joe asked, like 'How did David get to Heaven? Did Dad drive him in the red car?' helped me process and heal. We intently studied the verses in the Bible that talked about heaven and found our answers together."

A talented singer, Joe has been a member of his school chorus since fifth grade, participated in a district competition in ninth grade and served as an alternate his sophomore year. He also loves soccer, baseball and therapeutic horseback riding. When he's at Jill's House he enjoys swimming and playing on the moon bounce in the gym. Extremely outgoing and inquisitive, Joe has fondly been called the "Mayor of Jill's House" by staff, based on his deep desire to lead. During chapel time at Jill's House Joe gathers everyone together and sings!

Joe is also very detail oriented, with a special affinity for the Metro (Washington D.C.'s transportation system) and elevators. He knows all the train numbers and manufacturer names, and he remembers

when he rode them and with whom. "He picks up on details that we miss and stores them away," said Ackie. "It's an aspect of autism that I wish we could harness." Joe also loves *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy*. He can recite every show from the past four to five years, naming who won, and how much money they received. When Joe's at Jill's House, he has been known to entertain the staff with his imitations of Alex Trebek and Pat Sajak!

"The way Jill's House appreciates Joe's unique personality and helps him bloom is just remarkable," said Ackie. "Not only does he have fun, but when he's there, I know he's safe. He rarely has seizures but did experience one last summer while at Jill's House. It was handled so well by the Jill's House staff. We are so thankful for the way you love and appreciate Joe and take care of our family as a whole. You help our family stay strong and enjoy life."

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