

What if we couldn't Float? By Donnalee and Jim Stevens

There are many reasons why people make the decision not to canoe. There was a time when we were very close to making that same decision. Over the past several years, canoeing has become a sport that has become increasingly popular. As the trend caught on, the rivers were getting more crowded, unfortunately there weren't very many family friendly activities to do, and the party atmosphere became a place we couldn't take our family. We along with many other families, churches, and organizations were being forced into being one of those people who "don't float".

Another couple had become faced with the same dilemma. Paul and Julie Ewing of Overland Park had been planning youth and family trips for Olathe Bible Church, for six years before God inspired them to start a Canoe Ministry. Living Waters Christian Canoe Ministry was born in 2001. Named after a Biblical passage in the book of John, Living Waters launches at the Herrick Mill Dam near Camdenton, Mo., about 15 miles from Bennett Springs. With a sense of purpose, Paul set out to fulfill God's plan. He was able to gain exclusive use of an eight mile section of river, partner up with two camps (Windermere and Camp Cherry Mountain), and begin a journey that would give people and organizations back the ability to become "floaters" again.

In 2003, three families joined the Ewings as Event Directors, and dozens serve throughout the summer as host families, camp aids and river guides. Our family joined as one of the many who have been blessed by co-laboring in this special calling. Today, we serve as Event Directors and have been inspired by the discipleship that has been the fruit of lending ourselves to serve, as an entire family (of seven!).

The lower section of the Niangua has not been floated commercially for years. The steep bluffs and land ownership made that section inaccessible. In fact, in 2003 a road was chiseled that follows a ravine down what would otherwise be a 300 foot bluff at the Bible Camp, Camp Cherry Mountain. Since this is the only viable takeout, this section of the river is virtually controlled for ministry use.

As Living Waters enters its sixth year, we are excitedly booking up our schedule with repeat groups that are relieved to have a place to go that is wholesome, family friendly and close to God. Popular with Youth Groups, Scout Troops and Family Floats, this ministry is best known to Kansas City area churches where the Ewings live in Overland Park with their four boys.

Our experience has told us that there are several main reasons why someone would make the decision not to float. With a combination of an effective staff, ideal location, private river access, and God's hand, we feel that Living Waters provides answers to all of your canoeing dilemmas.

Is it too far away? Located in Central Missouri, we are just three hours from Kansas City near Camdenton (near the Lake of the Ozarks), just off 54 Highway. It should only take you three and a half hours to arrive at one of the camps from Saint Louis.

Are you worried that there isn't anything to do when you are not canoeing? Guests stay at one of two Church Camps (Camp Cherry Mountain and Windermere) they each provide diverse activities to choose from: swimming pool, climbing tower, zip line, miniature golf, basketball, soccer, boating, fishing, hiking and a full service marina.

Do you think it is too crowded? We enjoy the exclusive takeout on the lower section, our groups enjoy quiet and uncrowded floating down this beautiful river along majestic bluffs and beckoning gravel bars. Surprisingly, this section is "canoe" friendly with a steady current, clean water and stunning scenery.

Does the hot weather factor into your decision? The spring fed river keeps water temperature in the refreshing 70's, the cool from the flowing water and the shade can lower the air temperature 10 degrees of the hottest days. Steady lake breezes make for an enjoyable time at the camp, whether you are staying in a cabin or sleeping under the stars.

Are you concerned about the worldly atmosphere? Living Waters is a Christian Ministry, our takeout is at a Bible Camp, and the only groups who float with us are church groups, scout groups and families. Your day on the river and time at the camp will be family friendly and Christ centered. The volunteer staff and camp crew all have servant hearts to make your experience special.

In the past six years, we have had the honor to float over 6,000 floaters down our river. Every season is packed with repeat groups that have discovered a healthy, family friendly, and fun way to enjoy the sport of canoeing again.

Our ministry is designed to support other ministries. Hundreds of church members, Boy Scouts, and families throughout Kansas and Missouri participate in weekend canoe trips each summer. We support each ministry's message by providing an environment where you can share your message with others. We do offer a riverside worship service and incorporate a gospel message into each weekend, but our primary purpose is to support other ministries. There is a phenomenal river baptism opportunity at our takeout.

Time spent down at Living Waters, will enable your group to have more one-on-one time with your members. We are here for you. We will help you plan your event, cook your meals, guide your group down the river, and even pitch in to get that tent up (if you choose to tent instead of staying in a cabin).

Living Waters is a perfect place for an outreach opportunity. Churches and groups have been successful when they invite friends, family, or members of your community that might not be attending a church, to attend a float trip with them and their family. Not surprisingly, they have found that it is easier and more productive to invite others to join

them for a float trip with the church, than to invite them to a class, or outreach event. We have devotions that are included as part of the trip, but the overall approach to spirituality is casual and non-threatening. The Lord has a way of meeting them right there on the river bank. In a canoe or a kayak, there is a time where in the stark quiet, away from the comfort of noise that God can speak to us, revealing the hidden source of our unrest. It is profound and without concern for our age or circumstance.

Ask any of us "middle-agers" and we'll tell you our fondest memories of growing up was camping and canoeing with our family. We recall the time in a canoe more clearly than Disneyland.

We are waiting for the opportunity to show you around our place. We have a heart for God, a heart for canoeing, and a heart for you! We want to show you that you can put "yes" back into your vocabulary when you are asked the question, "Do you float?"

Canoe trips along the beautiful lower section of the Niangua River with Living Waters has something unique for you and your group!

Find out how Living Waters Christian Canoe Ministry can make ministry happen for your next float trip. Details at www.john738.com 816-853-9981