Joni Eareckson Tada Surprised at Controversy Over Song's Oscar Nomination

Joni and Friends founder Joni Eareckson Tada was as surprised as the rest of the nation to learn that among this year's Academy Award Best Original Song nominees was one that involved her. Tada was honored by the invitation from the film's producer to give voice to the film's title song, "Alone Yet Not Alone," in the fall of 2013 and was merely looking forward to its nationwide release in theaters in June.

That all changed, however, with the announcement of the nominees last week, bringing attention from across the U.S. to the song and Tada's performance. Those not familiar with the name Joni Eareckson Tada or her ethereal voice have been surprised to discover that she has been doing her singing from a wheelchair for more than 47 years, having been paralyzed in a diving accident in 1967 at age 17.

Tada recalls the occasion when she was invited to record the song for the film.

"Last year when I spoke at the closing session of the National Religious Broadcasters' convention, I sang several hymns as part of my message," she says. "In the audience were some people connected with Enthuse Entertainment and the producer of *Alone Yet Not Alone*, who later asked if I would be interested in recording the theme song for the movie.

"When I heard the simple, melodic ballad, I wanted to record it. I really resonated with the words—after all, I sit down in a stand-up world and often feel alone; but of course with my faith in God, I'm never really alone! The Bible is filled with stories of God picking ill-equipped, unskilled people for places of great influence, which is how I feel as a

quadriplegic singing an Academy Award-nominated song."

There has been some surprise in industry circles that a relatively unknown, faith-based historical film has received such attention, but those involved have said the song is deserving of such attention as both a musical work and for its integral role in the film.

Alone Yet Not Alone is set in 1755 and features two young sisters who are kidnapped by Delaware Indians during the French and Indian War. It is their faith and a family hymn—"Alone Yet Not Alone"—that help them stay strong and endure such hardship.

Tada hopes to use the recent attention on her and this song to increase awareness and further the work of God through the ministry of Joni and Friends, which she founded in 1979.

"Can you imagine how this might encourage other people with disabilities? It's all about God's power in our weakness, and I love the chance to advance that message!" she says.

Tada's influence began following the release of an autobiographical book and subsequent movie about her life, both entitled *Joni*, which provided encouragement to other individuals with disabilities across the nation and around the world. She and a few friends—many of whom had helped mentor her spiritually—realized from the mail and phone calls pouring in that there was a significant need for such a ministry.

Following the establishment of Joni and Friends to help meet that need, Tada went on to have an important role in determining how individuals with disabilities would be treated in public, in the workplace, in schools, etc., as part of the committee involved in making recommendations for the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Since that time, Joni and Friends has expanded greatly beyond Tada's wildest expectations as far as the number of people the

organization is able to serve and the variety of services it provides, but it has never deviated from its original purpose of sharing the hope of God’s love with a segment of the world’s population that is often overlooked and ostracized.

“From the beginning, we focused on developing programs that would help meet both the spiritual and practical needs of disabled people and their families,” Tada says. “We’ve grown to include an important emphasis on training and equipping individuals to serve the disability community, as well, realizing this would greatly accelerate this type of ministry around the world.”