

In the Eye of the
HURRICANE

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Prologue

“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed....”

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

“Maamaaa! Where are yooouu?!”

I could hear the sound of Ben’s little feet as he bounced up the stairs. The rattle of paper could be heard as Ben arrived outside my bathroom door where I lay relaxing in a bubble bath.

Knock, knock.

“Who is it?” I asked, a smile forming around my lips.

The locked doorknob turned side to side. “It’s me, Benjamin. Open the door, please.”

“Mama is taking a bath, Baby-Love. But I’m almost finished. Can you wait just a minute?”

An impatient sigh.

Silence.

Then, his voice full of hope, “Are you done yet, Mama?”

I smiled to myself. Four-year-old Ben could consistently be relied upon to need me, desperately, as soon as I got into the bathtub each evening.

I grabbed my bathrobe, wrapped it around myself and unlocked the door. Ben’s dancing storm blue eyes looked up into mine and an infectious grin burst across his beautiful face.

As I stood there cold and dripping, my heart was filled with love and the deepest gratitude to God as I beheld the face of this little angel.

He was so perfect, so handsome, so healthy and robust....

“Look, Mama, read it!” he exclaimed, holding up the paper he had made on the computer.

Ben smiled proudly as he waited for the praise he was sure would ensue. “Oh! That is so wonderful, Baby! You are so smart! I love you...” I kissed him on top of the head, breathing in his fresh clean scent.

Ben cocked his head to one side and smiled coyly, “I love you too, Mama...” He hugged me tightly around the legs before grabbing his paper and galloping off happily down the hall to show his masterpiece to his sister.

In his blue snowflake pajamas and house slippers he was beginning to look more and more like a little boy than a baby now. He was tall and well-built. He often reminded me of one of those handsome little boys you might see in a boy's choir with his rosy cheeks, perfect full lips, and neatly cropped sandy hair.

“Look! Sarah...”

Standing there watching him that night was such bittersweet victory. The scene was one that was so commonplace and ordinary...so normal....

This child who was once silent...now spoke.

Who was once violent...now loving.

Who was unreachable...now reaching out.

Whose future on this planet seemed forever lost...now restored.

We had weathered the storm...and survived. We were stronger now... much stronger.

We were living proof that the testing of one's faith produces patience.

The fear, grief, and hopelessness that had ruled our lives a little over two years before seemed now like a terrible nightmare that was fading with the light of the dawn.

And what a nightmare it had been....

PART 1
The Gathering of the Clouds



Gordon getting the big welcome from Dylan and Sarah on wedding day.

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
The fruit of the womb is His reward.”

Psalms 127:3 NKJV

May 2, 2000

After a difficult pregnancy and a complicated delivery, my husband and I gazed breathlessly at the tiny form that lay lifeless and silent on my abdomen.

Dr. Priddle and his nurse stared anxiously as well before the doctor grabbed the tiny feet in one hand and slapped them once...twice...three times...the tiny arms gave a jerk!!!

Silence.

The doctor slapped the tiny feet once more.

Then, finally, the smallest whimper could be heard...

Benjamin began to move his head from side to side as if he were reluctantly waking from a deep sleep. “Waa...” he whimpered again.

“That cry ain’t loud enough to suit me just yet, Boy!” Dr. Priddle exclaimed as he whisked him from my abdomen into the heated bassinet where he and his nurse proceeded to rub him down vigorously, check his oxygen saturation, and further examine him.

We could see the concerned expressions of the doctor and nurse begin to relax as we finally heard a hearty “WAAA! WAAAA!!!”

Dr. Priddle smiled and held up a newly “pinked up” version of the frighteningly bluish baby he had taken from me a moment before. “Daddy, take a picture of your beautiful baby boy!”

Late that evening, I sat propped up in my hospital bed with Gordon peering over my shoulder curiously watching Benjamin’s every blink and

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*At the time of this printing, there is no known, specific cause of autism. Current research suggests there is a genetic correlation—although no single gene has been directly linked to autism.*

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EYE OF THE HURRICANE

grimace.

That night as Ben studied my face, I whispered to Gordon, “You know, it’s a scary thing to look into those little eyes and realize that they depend on you for everything. God has put us to the task of being everything to this tiny person.”

Ben continued to look directly into my eyes as I spoke, “He looks at us as if he knows that or something. Do you know what I mean? And I always thought newborns couldn’t see well, but look. He even looks like he is listening to what I am saying.”

Ben’s eyes shifted back and forth from my face to Gordon’s as we reveled in the magical moment that all new parents experience whether it is their first child or their tenth.

After seven weeks of blissful motherhood, I reluctantly returned to my job as a dental hygienist. The only consolation being that Gordon had ninety days of paternity leave which he arranged to begin the day I returned to work.

Our close-knit office consisted of four females with the dentist, Jennifer, being my age and delivering her first child only nine days after Ben’s birth.

We were equally reluctant to leave our babies and spent the work days telling baby stories and comparing diaper brands.

The separation was eased as much as it could be, with my mother’s-guilt placated only by the fact that Jennifer and I had agreed to no longer work on Fridays and that Benjamin was safely nestled in Daddy’s arms for the time being.

During Gordon’s paternity leave, we searched for the perfect person to keep our baby. After endless interviews, we finally settled on a woman who lived one block from my office in order for me to go over during lunch to feed Ben.

Charlotte seemed to adore Ben and he seemed to love her. At five months old, he was just beginning to roll over and was becoming increasingly gregarious and engaging. However, something still bothered me about leaving Ben.

I had noticed in the past few weeks that Ben was frequently stiffening his body when I held him and would often attempt to throw himself backward out of my arms. He seemed to be crying excessively for no apparent reason. We could find nothing to justify such crying fits. He was too old to be developing colic. Gordon and I tried to reason that maybe he was beginning to get teeth,

WEATHERING THE STORM

maybe he had a headache, maybe he was just becoming spoiled....

As difficult as Ben was becoming for Gordon or myself to manage for longer and more frequent periods of time, I began to worry about leaving him with anyone. After all, no one loves a child more and can tolerate challenging behavior more than his own parents, right? What if, one day, Charlotte just had enough and began abusing or neglecting him? Dare we take that risk? After four weeks, we decided to let Charlotte go.

Gordon and I discussed my quitting work and came to the conclusion that we simply could not get by without my income no matter how we tried to budget. Finally, we were able to adjust both our work schedules so that one of us could always be home with the baby. I worked during the day and Gordon worked during the evening and on Fridays and Saturdays.

At Benjamin's six-month checkup, our family physician, Dr. Charles, could find nothing to justify such turbulent behavior and dismissed it as "his disposition." Benjamin, by all appearances, was a healthy boy except for a chronically itchy nose. He was constantly pawing at his nose, which was often runny, but had no fever or other signs of an actual "cold." We assumed this must be the precursor to a future allergy problem.

We visited an allergist who was quick to inform us that babies this small did not have "real" allergies. Just to be safe, Gordon and I opted to get rid of the family cat anyway.

By six months, Ben had reached the 100th percentile in height and the 95th percentile in weight. He was in all respects a beautiful baby with thick, dark eyebrows and eyelashes that perfectly offset his unusual deep-navy eyes. Even a few of the burly macho men of our rural Kentucky town often surprisingly commented, "He's so...so...Well...he's just...a purdy li'l guy."

Much of the time, Ben was a happy child, smiling and seeking out others to interact with. More and more frequently, however, the raging storms were beginning to roll in...