

*The Eye of the Hurricane is an enlightening and refreshing story of how a family in need can rise above adversity and develop their own solutions to the difficulties they face. Rather than be inhibited by the lack of available services when their young son was diagnosed with autism, Juli and Gordon designed a structured curriculum incorporating direct instruction and best practices. The resulting changes have been amazing. Ben was transformed from a child who was out of control to an exceptional accelerated learner. I fully endorse the manuscript and think it will provide other parents who have children with disabilities with hope and inspiration.*

Dr. Mark T. Harvey, BCBA, PhD  
Dept. of Special Education, Vanderbilt University

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*I have had the opportunity to review the Liske's programming, see videos of their early sessions, and observe Juli doing therapy with Ben. It was difficult to believe she had no formal training in ABA or autism.*

*The early videos documented Ben's autism. He was nonverbal, had difficulty attending to and interacting with his parents, and engaged in self-stimulating behaviors. When I observed Ben in 2004, he enjoyed interaction with his parents, was able to speak in full sentences, and could read fluently. The Liske's were able to achieve a miraculous outcome for their child!*

*Juli is an inspiration to parents everywhere. She is proof that parents can help their children make tremendous gains, even when professionals are unavailable. I have had the privilege of reading her book. I feel that parents of children with autism need a book like this to encourage them. They need to see that they can help their children by educating themselves. This book would also be beneficial to professionals. Parents are a child's best resource. Professionals providing services to families with children with autism need to recognize the importance of the parent's role in their child's success. One day I hope to be able to recommend Juli's book to all the families to whom I provide services.*

Lisa Maurer Ellzy, BSSW, MA

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## Book Review: The Eye of the Hurricane

*A riveting read that plunges deep into one family's world of autism. Author Juli Liske spins a real life but atypical autism tale of two rural, working-class parents who confront discouraging, deeply entrenched and disturbing manifestations of the disorder with sheer grit and admirably relentless determination. This is not a book about a wealthy family with a plethora of money, personnel, and resources. And, therein lies, in part, the inspiration and encouragement this book gifts the reader. Another gift for readers is learning how the Liske family burrowed in and created an innovative home-spun intervention team, which is also a lesson in creativity and ingenuity. What results is the culling of an extraordinary little boy and a mother's journey from despair into the genuine realization of autism's special blessings. A worthy addition to anyone's library!*

Leisa A. Hammett, mother, advocate, author of forthcoming book: *The Journey with Grace: a mother's reflections of raising a child with autism*

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*Juli Liske's "In the Eye of the Hurricane" is a profoundly beautiful and moving book. To read it is to share in the journey of the Liske family, not just from rural Eastern Kentucky to Middle Tennessee, but also in their journey from brokenness to healing, from helplessness to empowerment, and from despair to hope. There is a very difficult struggle that parents of children on the autism spectrum come to know. That is, the struggle between the desire to do anything, everything that you possibly can for your child with autism to help ease his way and lessen his challenges, and on the other hand, the innate knowledge a parent has that despite what the world would have you believe, your child is perfect just as he is. Add in the challenges of keeping expectations as high as possible, and it's little wonder many families lose hope, give up the fight, and accept the status quo.*

*"In the Eye of the Hurricane" is the story of a family calling on their inner reserve of Faith to embrace that struggle and use it as a path to a richer life for themselves, and particularly for their son Ben. This story of how the Liske's crafted a program for Ben where no program existed,*

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*and are continuing to learn to challenge him in the ways he needs to bring out the unique, wonderful person that he will become, is a story that will inspire and challenge ALL of us to become better parents to our own children.*

John Shouse, Parent  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair, Autism Society of America  
Past President, Autism Society of Middle Tennessee

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*As I read this book, I was impacted on several levels. First, as a parent, my little boy was recently diagnosed with autism. Throughout the book, I found myself crying and smiling at the same time because of the realness to the experiences Juli shares. The similarities of our journeys are striking. From the frustration in dealing with medical professionals to the all consuming fear of facing such a difficult diagnosis, Juli has put words to the wide range of emotions experienced by myself and so many others.*

*On another level, as a professional in the field of developmental disabilities, I found Juli's writing to be reader friendly as well as responsible and written with integrity. She does not claim to have a cure for autism but is sharing a treatment method that has been effective with her son. She and her family demonstrate what commitment and hard work can achieve.*

*Lastly, as a Christian, I found myself relying on God and His Word for comfort and strength; specifically using many of the same passages Juli shares in her book.*

***The Eye of the Hurricane** is a useful resource for any parent at any stage of this journey; for any professional seeking a better understanding a parent's perspective - Juli offers guidance and support for both parents and professionals. I am inspired by her determination, creativity, and commitment.*

Kimberly Dean, MA in Clinical Psychology  
Director of Staff Development and Training, Division of Mental  
Retardation Services.

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# EYE OF THE HURRICANE

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In the Eye of the  
**HURRICANE**

**By Juli Liske**



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### **Disclaimer**

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### **Note from the author:**

The names and identifying details of persons in this book who could possibly be construed as being portrayed in a negative light have been changed to protect their right to privacy.

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*To Papa*  
*(known to thousands of children as*  
*“The real Santa”)*

*Who has made the world a better place by making a  
difference in the lives of children—one child at a time.*



To everything there is a season,  
A time for every purpose under heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die;  
A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted;  
A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
A time to break down, and a time to build up;  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones;  
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
A time to gain, and a time to lose;  
A time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
A time to tear, and a time to sew;  
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate;  
A time of war, and a time of peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-9 NKJV

## 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.

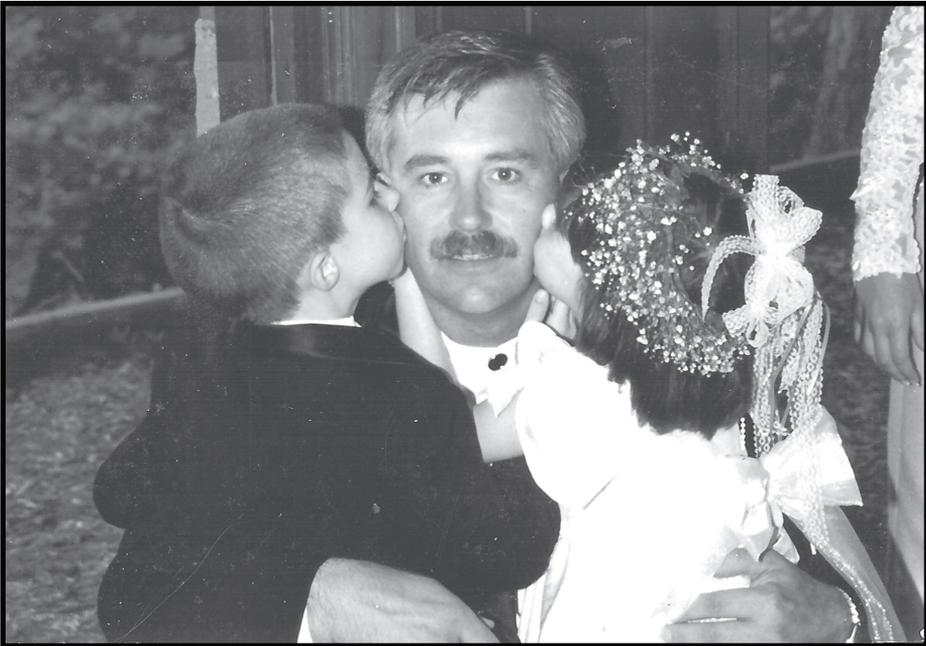
We had weathered the storm...and survived. We were stronger now... much stronger.

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.*

## WEATHERING THE STORM

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

Psalms 127:3 NKJV

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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.*

## EYE OF THE HURRICANE

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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.

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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

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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...