



Portrait of
and
Love

JO FORREST
IN ZUCKER

An Journey Autism

"Lured by love, the crocus kept
spring's promise. Lured by love,
I too will flower."

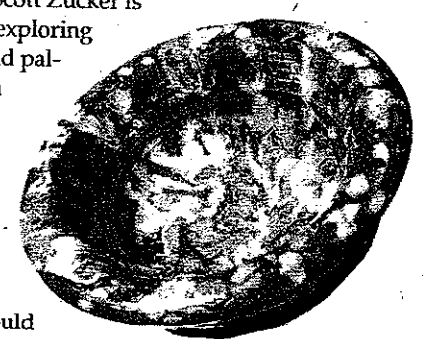
- K. Sherman

Portrait of light & love

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His basement studio bursts with all colors and projects in the making. Vibrant hues splashed on canvas, collages, small pine cones gathered and placed in a tiny terra cotta bowl glazed with autumn colors fill the room. Scott Zucker is in his glory, an artist in progress, exploring a limitless world through paint and palette. This budding VanGogh is ten and autistic.



Scott was diagnosed with autism when he was two years old. His parents, Robin and Eric Zucker of Birmingham were concerned about his delayed speech and lack of eye contact. A medical diagnosis confirmed that Scott would be forever challenged due to this central nervous system disorder. His parents were heartened however, when they learned how important early intervention could be and they dove with passion and commitment into Scott's healing journey.

"I sent my husband to the store and told him to bring me home every book he could find on autism," shares Robin. "We became extremely depressed reading the written literature and research on it. We found little support in the school system or medical community. We knew that if we were going to make a difference in this child's life, it would be completely up to us."

And that is exactly what tack they chose. Robin and Eric dove headlong into advocacy for Scott, finding him the resources and learning opportunities that could reach into his unusual world. Robin watched him like a hawk, discovering what made him tick, what "set him off," what opened up a pathway for him. "I know if I take my time, I can figure you out," became Robin's slogan as she dedicated herself day in and day out to Scott's unfolding nature. Along with constant praise, acceptance, unconditional love and one-on-one guidance Scott's skills grew daily.

When traditional methods of teaching and learning bore little fruit, the Zuckers immersed themselves and Scott in alternative therapies. Auditory integration to retrain his hearing was one avenue. Sensory integration was another which proved highly successful and is still used at home today. Craniosacral therapy was "profound" says Robin and provided a major key that unlocked the doorway to Scott's well being. With extended use, these alternative therapies opened up an exciting new world for him- the world of art.

Robin explains, "Around the age of three, Scott began pouring glue into his liquid paints. I had no idea he was trying to achieve a thickening medium. Soon thereafter, his language skills developed. He told me to get paint like toothpaste. I bought him a tube of acrylic paint, then he went to the kitchen and found a butter knife to spread his paint. I then got him his first palate knife. Turning his canvas over so the stretcher part became the frame, he painted this first, gold or silver. I knew he saw in his imagination a complete finished picture. He continued to paint with thick rich brush strokes like VanGogh. His paintings took shape and flourished in growth."

periences inspire Scott to explore new media. Painting found objects, making collages, squashing flowers into terra cotta pots made on a pottery wheel are a few ways he expresses himself," boasts Robin, who is filled with pride over her son's artistic bent. "Almost every scene Scott paints is of nature. Oceans, skies, sun, flowers and trees. We take walks every day (it helps to calm him and keep him balanced) and he discovers new ways, through what he sees in nature, to express himself."

Because autism is characterized by outbursts of uncontrollable behavior, it is important to provide a child like Scott with calming experiences. Water has that effect on Scott and after a day in the pool Robin noticed him more alert and sequencing, which gave her a wonderful new idea. She took her family on a quest for adventure in the form of dolphin therapy in the Florida Keys, "a life changing experience for all of us," she states. "Scott's swim with the dolphins helped elevate his senses to the point that he realized verbal communication and started using language as a means to get his point across. It is a peaceful and natural surrounding for developmental progress to occur."

Robin and Eric's selfless dedication to Scott's progress is illustrated by their constant search for new, enriching experiences for him. They hope to send him to an artist's retreat in New Mexico and have received an invitation from the Upledger (Craniosacral) Institute to participate in a research project while living on a houseboat for a week in the Bahamas. Funds are limited for such adventures, but Robin's determination prevails, often finding grant money for Scott's education.

her son's life the focus of a private crusade to help him become a responsible, independent adult, despite what the medical community or research might say. Their choice to home school him was central to this mission. Each day is based totally around Scott and what he can or cannot handle. Some days are slower than others; he might play or paint, walk in the park or hang out with dad in the garage. ("He loves power tools," says Robin.) Other days are a frenetic burst of energy with watching the weather channel on TV; chores around the house; going to the library, the recycle center, or the local fruit stand; playing with neighborhood kids. Home schooling and his studies are woven throughout the day. Scott also receives private tutoring in simple math, beginning reading and phonics, and the computer.

"We praise the small things he does each day. We are grateful and accepting of all he can do, and yet we continually strive for more," continues Robin. "A friend once said she thought of Scott as 'artistic' not 'autistic.' I disagree. I applaud Scott's autism. He is a remarkable child. All you need is to see him in his beauty. He is an absorbent sponge seeking out

new experiences on his own. Our home has become his gallery, rooms filled with paintings, collages and ceramics. So much energy fills this space. Scott is a spark that touches many people, yet, he doesn't realize it. We are thankful for his art as his gift and as an outlet." ✨

Currently Scott Zucker is showing some canvases at Art-space Gallery, 303 W. Maple, Birmingham, MI. Feel free to contact the Zuckers at 42 Kensington Blvd., Pleasant R., MI. 48069.

Jan Deremo Forrest is the Senior Editor of Healing Garden Journal.



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