



The Spark: A Mother's Story of Nurturing, Genius, and Autism

Kristine Barnett

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Kristine Barnett's son Jacob has an IQ higher than Einstein's, a photographic memory, and he taught himself calculus in two weeks. At nine he started working on an original theory in astrophysics that experts believe may someday put him in line for a Nobel Prize, and at age twelve he became a paid researcher in quantum physics. But the story of Kristine's journey with Jake is all the more remarkable because his extraordinary mind was almost lost to autism. At age two, when Jake was diagnosed, Kristine was told he might never be able to tie his own shoes.

The Spark is a remarkable memoir of mother and son. Surrounded by "experts" at home and in special ed who tried to focus on Jake's most basic skills and curtail his distracting interests—moving shadows on the wall, stars, plaid patterns on sofa fabric—Jake made no progress, withdrew more and more into his own world, and eventually stopped talking completely. Kristine knew in her heart that she had to make a change. Against the advice of her husband, Michael, and the developmental specialists, Kristine followed her instincts, pulled Jake out of special ed, and began preparing him for mainstream kindergarten on her own.

Relying on the insights she developed at the daycare center she runs out of the garage in her home, Kristine resolved to follow Jacob's "spark"—his passionate interests. Why concentrate on what he couldn't do? Why not focus on what he could? This basic philosophy, along with her belief in the power of ordinary childhood experiences (softball, picnics, s'mores around the campfire) and the importance of play, helped Kristine overcome huge odds.

The Barnetts were not wealthy people, and in addition to financial hardship, Kristine herself faced serious health issues. But through hard work and determination on behalf of Jake and his two younger brothers, as well as an undying faith in their community, friends, and family, Kristine and Michael prevailed. The results were beyond anything anyone could have imagined.

Dramatic, inspiring, and transformative, *The Spark* is about the power of love and courage in the face of overwhelming obstacles, and the dazzling possibilities that can occur when we learn how to tap the true potential that lies within every child, and in all of us.

Praise for *The Spark*

"[An] amazing memoir . . . compulsive reading."—*The Washington Post*

"*The Spark* is about the transformative power of unconditional love. If you have a child who's 'different'—and who doesn't?—you won't be able to put it down."—**Sylvia Nasar, author of *A Beautiful Mind***

"Love, illness, faith, tragedy and triumph—it's all here. . . . Jake Barnett's story contains wisdom for every parent."—*Newsday*

"This eloquent memoir about an extraordinary boy and a resilient and remarkable mother will be of interest

to every parent and/or educator hoping to nurture a child's authentic 'spark.'"—*Publishers Weekly*

"Compelling . . . Jake is unusual, but so is his superhuman mom."—*Booklist*

"*The Spark* describes in glowing terms the profound intensity with which a mother can love her child."—**Andrew Solomon, author of *The Noonday Demon* and *Far from the Tree***

"Every parent and teacher should read this fabulous book!"—**Temple Grandin, author of *Thinking in Pictures* and co-author of *The Autistic Brain***

From the Hardcover edition.

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