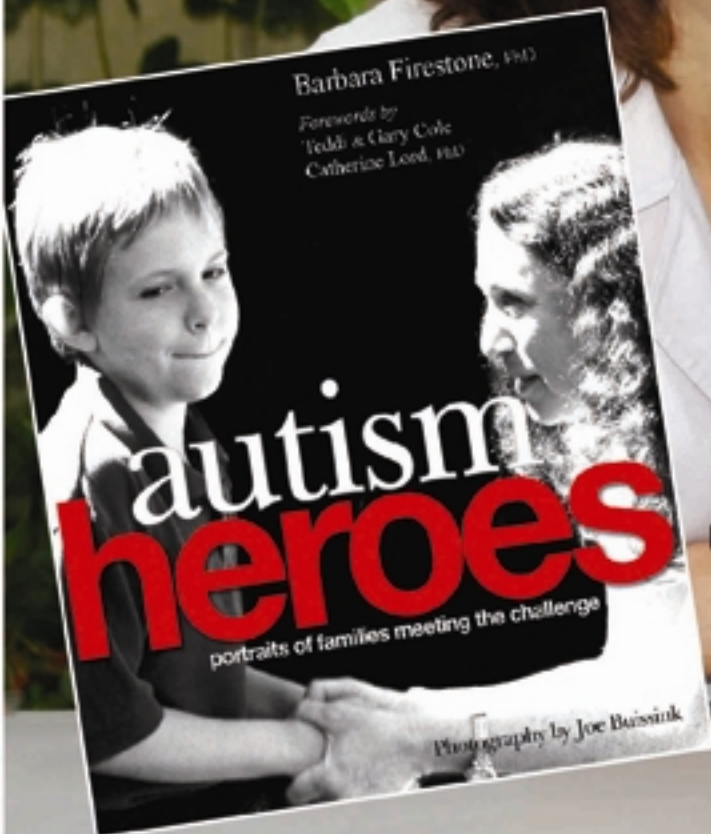


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The **AUTISM** magazine
TAP INTO IT.
perspective

Barbara Firestone, PhD
*President & CEO,
The Help Group*



dr. barbara firestone
talks to
**families meeting
the challenge**

The Struggles of an Early Life

By Russell Lehmann

My name is Russell Lehmann and I am 16 years old. My doctor diagnosed me with high-functioning autism when I was 12. The most problematic things in my life are OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), anxiety and depression.

Living with OCD is extremely tough. A few years ago, it took over my life. Everything I looked at I would have to look at again, in duplicates of four. I believed that if I looked at something an odd number of times, my

family and I would be struck with bad luck.

If I did look at something an odd number of times, I would be overwhelmed by what I call "intrusive thoughts," such as family members dying, our house catching on fire, and so forth. Once these thoughts

entered my mind, I would become very depressed. When the depression hit, my OCD would become even worse. All of these things put a ton of stress on me. My whole life seemed like it was fading away.

I have also had a share of panic attacks in my life. Well, actually a ton of panic attacks. In the third grade, I stopped attending school. The only place where I felt comfortable was inside my home. It was very difficult for me to go outside. I never went back to school that year. This event repeated itself for the next two years.

I had isolated myself from the world. I lost friendships with all of my friends because I was afraid they would ask me why I wasn't at school. I did not like talking about it. Whenever I was in a big crowd of people, my whole body would shut down. I was a victim of sensory overload.

When I finally received some help, it was amazing how fast I recovered. On February 3, 2003, I was admitted to the psychiatric unit in Children's Hospital. The next five weeks were the toughest weeks of my life. When I was discharged in March, everything I experienced was great, compared to the atmosphere of the hospital.

I have since regained control of my life. I lowered my OCD to the lowest it has been in a very long time, and I have learned many coping methods to deal with my anxiety. Currently, I am enrolled in a virtual school through my computer.

This story was difficult for me to write. It is intended to spread the word about autism and to let others know what it is like living with it. I also hope this will help you understand more about autism. **TAP**



Russell Lehmann