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Cover Art: *Two Ships*

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

TWO SHIPS

Amy Monroe and Aiden Monroe

Two Ships

Watercolor and chalk on paper (2017)

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He paints, 3-year-old chubby hands. Impulsive, quick, satisfied.

I start. I see our marks together - to see whatever it is we see.

Can I paint alone? Yes. Will my work turn out OK? Sometimes. In the beginning of Aiden's autism diagnosis, painting provided me the isolation and the break to work through whatever it was I needed to work through. *My son can't talk*, would play in my head over and over, as I painted abstract fish. Fish were Aiden's favorite thing at the time, and I felt I could work through my emotions in tears behind the canvas, painting his favorite thing, and channeling the repetition he loved. I'd cry, paint, clean up, and join the family again.

Then I changed. I decided not to paint alone. I decided to share that sacred art space. I brought my paints, set up the space, and let my son lead.

What a completely different experience. A much happier one. Now when I paint, there are laughs, breaks, giggles, tickles, paint everywhere, and two artists walking away happy with their creation, whatever it is, satisfied. There is no grade needed. No piece fails, because a true and loving moment in partnership and collaboration has just been captured with my nonverbal, loving autistic son. Sharing

the same brushes, the same paint, the same paper, the same moment, the same air, the same memory. No words needed.

Whatever is created is the right thing.

Partnership in movement, color, and emotion.

Creating together, side by side, no words. Just us - sharing our space and sometimes a glance. Or maybe I stim with him - watching the paint slowly drip off the paper.

I watch in amazement his impulse, the brush slapped across the paper, and stand back and realize that is the most natural mark I have ever seen painted.

I could paint alone and have total control. But I learned that for me, the experience won't be nearly as good. And what is good? Who determines it? What determines it? Good is the happiness - the joy - we take away. If I look at the paper and wonder, *What next?* In that moment, Aiden has filled it. And whatever the last mark is, it is. Collaboration. Partnership. Love.

Amy Monroe is an Autism Advocate. Aiden Monroe, age 3, is Amy's son.

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