

TO HHeaven

By:
Ari
Hallmark



After the Storm

Co-Authored By: Lisa Reburn, PH. D. • Additional Artwork?
By: Kim Hunt •

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The hope of Heaven shared through the eyes of a six-year-old after the April 27,2011 tornadoes

Ari Hallmark

Lisa Reburn, Ph.D.

Presented to

Presented by

Date

People in the story:

Jennifer -Ari's mother	Jennifer Garmany Hallmark
Shane -Ari's father	Shane Hallmark
Maw Maw -Ari's grandmother (Shane's mother)	Ann Hallmark
Paw Paw -Ari's grandfather (Shane's father)	Philip Hallmark
Jayden -Ari's cousin (Julie's twin)	Jayden Hallmark
Julie -Ari's cousin (Jayden's twin)	Julie Hallmark
Paw Paw Garmany -Ari's grandfather (Jennifer's father)	Mike Garmany
Meme -Ari's great-grandmother (Jennifer's grandmother)	Marlene Handley
Nanny -Ari's grandmother (Jennifer's mother)	Susan Garmany

To Heaven After the Storm
By Ari Hallmark & Lisa Reburn

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To Heaven After the Storm

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To Ari, for allowing me to join you on your very personal journey and for giving me a better picture of the immediacy of the transition from this life to Heaven...Lisa

PROLOGUE

Lisa's Story...

I met Ari for the first time at the only five-casket visitation I've ever attended. I've worked with children at their parent's or grandparent's visitation for several years helping them to understand and participate in their own way. This was different. Ari didn't lose *a* parent or *a* grandparent, but *both* of her parents and *both* of her paternal grandparents *and* her baby cousin. They were all killed in the horrible April 27th tornadoes of 2011 in Arab, Alabama. This heartbreaking situation threw Ari and me into a chance (or maybe *not*) relationship that led to a friendship and ultimately this book. We've also worked on a joint effort to create a Christian curriculum called *Treasure Boxes* for those who want to help other grieving children through visitations, funerals and grief.

I knew she was only six. My first memory of Ari was outside the sanctuary where she was carried by her mother's brother, her Uncle Josh. She looked so tiny and pale. She was beautiful too and our eyes met in a long gaze as we were introduced. I saw sadness in her big blue eyes but I also saw a calmness that seemed to have an extraordinary amount of maturity behind it. We didn't exchange very many words, but we did exchange several eye to eye communications while she was in her uncle's arms. Actually, what words could have even started to be appropriate?

She wore a chiffon black and white dress and she had a little white bow attached to the part of her hair that wasn't shaved as a result of the thirty to forty staples in her head. She had her right arm around her uncle's shoulder and her left casted arm was against her body. She had on black shoes and I was told to watch how I touched her as she had nearly seventy stitches running across her back hidden underneath her dainty dress.

I felt completely inadequate for this job! I said *another* prayer for God's special strength and I led Ari and two of her young cousins to the area I'd prepared for them just underneath the windows that looked into the sad affair taking place in the sanctuary. I had a child's table set up in that separate but open space. There were crayons, paper, construction paper, markers, glue sticks, stickers, scissors, jewelry sets and other arts and craft items for the children to do with as they wished. Two large tubs of construction toys: Lincoln Logs and Tinker Toys were close by. A Hazelnut candle burned to add a soothing smell to the room.

We helped the children who came in and out make cards for Ari and helped Ari make cards for her family to put in their caskets if she wanted or simply to express herself. She was told that we would take her to see her family in the sanctuary at any time, but she didn't have to go at all. Ari refused to say "caskets" but continued to refer to the beautiful containers holding so many of her family members as "treasure boxes." How appropriate! She was correct; they were indeed treasure boxes, embracing the most precious treasures she had on this earth.

Children and adults came and went throughout the night. Quickly we realized that we needed to protect Ari from too many adults coming to express their often overwhelming sadness for her. It was too much for her. We allowed all children in and they sat close to her and chit-chatted with Ari in their normal happy carefree way as they all worked on art projects together. This allowed Ari to relax.

Each child who came in was able to put a few stitches in a stuffed animal we worked together on throughout the night for a keepsake for Ari. (I wasn't able to find the simple stuffed bear I'd used before and Ari's kindergarten teacher, Laura, actually had to rescue us by piecing together and orchestrating the children's participation in the assembly of the unintentionally complicated stuffed animal!) Visiting children built log cabins and rocket ships and a wide variety of imaginary objects throughout the night as their parents waited in the lines that wrapped around the aisles, throughout the church, out the front door, through the parking lot and down the street to some unseen ending point.

Ari made a bracelet that said "MOM" and wanted to give it to her mother. She did not want to go to her Mom's "treasure box" but wanted me to be sure her mother had it before she was buried. I knew her mother, who was to have graduated Valedictorian of her nursing class the very next evening, would have loved the bracelet. Several of us made sure to arrange for Ari's request to be honored.

There was one thing that happened (well, actually *didn't* happen) that I regret. I wanted all the people there visiting the family to have an opportunity to take a piece of paper and write a note to Ari about a special memory or a funny story involving one of Ari's family members. I've done this before and it makes a wonderful gift several weeks later; a bound tribute to the lives of those who have died written by the people who knew them best. I put out paper, a large variety of pens and colored markers and some type of instruction page. I thought people would see this for themselves and participate. Unfortunately, my thoughts were incorrect and after the long night, I finally wandered to the area where I'd left the materials and found that no one understood what I intended and no notes had been written. I realized that in the past, I'd asked someone to stand there and invite people to write. I was upset with myself for failing to fully think this through. Ari would have read those notes for years, probably for the rest of her life. Lesson learned.

I have no idea how many people came to that visitation...hundreds, probably thousands. It was an extremely long night

and after about three hours, Ari requested to go home. I thought, “Where is her home?” Her parents’ newly build house (finished only ten days before the tornado) was standing and everything was just as they left it the morning of April 27, but it wasn’t her home anymore. It was the people who lived there that made her home and this house might never be her home again.

I really don’t even know where Ari went “home” that night. After she left, her kindergarten teacher told me she needed my help. “I need to know what to tell the children tomorrow when they come back for the first day after the tornadoes,” she said. I must have started with a fairly simple answer because she stopped me and asked “Do you know about Ari’s dreams?” “Dreams? No, I don’t know anything about Ari’s dreams,” I said.

You’re not going to believe this, but it’s true! In late October or early November, Ari started really crying at school. Not simple kindergarten crying; sobbing, over and over again...day after day. Ari said she had a dream and she *knew* both of her parents were going to die and she just wanted to leave school and spend some time with them. This went on for nearly two months! Every single day!

There was just no real comforting her. The kids in our class saw all of this of course. Ari would apologize to me and say ‘I know I’m worrying you and I know I’m making it hard for you to do your job, but I can’t help it. I *know* they are going to die and I need to be with them while I have them.’ Of course we’d say things like ‘Ari, they are just dreams. Your parents are *not* going to die. You are going to be okay.’ We held her, rocked her, had her parents pick her up, had her talk to our counselor, the nurse...everything! The counselor even gave her “Dream Catchers” to catch the bad dreams. *Nothing* made her stop.

Her parents were torn up. Ari had never had any type of behavior problems before, but she was relentless! Her parents tried a variety of strategies; talking, reasoning, bribing, even threatening but nothing changed Ari’s insistence that she *knew* they were both going to die and she just wanted to spend time with them. Finally, her parents made an agreement with Ari. They would hold a meeting to tell the extended family (including Ari) their wishes just *in case* they both were to die at the same time. They also promised Ari they would take a week-long family vacation together to Gatlinburg right after Jennifer (Ari’s mother) graduated. This was in exchange for Ari’s not bringing this subject up again at school.

This agreement apparently satisfied Ari and the crying finally came to an end. Some things just *cannot* be explained!

So here we are... We introduced Ari’s book at the 5K Run that was held in memory of her mother on the one-year anniversary of the tornados. The run was held to start a scholarship for future nurses. This was the first of many years that Ari will mark as a day to remember. It seemed perfectly fitting to present her story at this special time. Her parents and grandparents would be so very proud of her! Ari obviously is an extremely unique and special individual and I predict that she will do great things for other people throughout her life. She’s starting off early! At seven, she’s coauthoring this book to share her story. She helped me decide that proceeds from the sale of this book will go towards making the curriculum, *Treasure Boxes*, available for free for individuals, churches and other groups who would like to start a special faith-based ministry for grieving children.

You are about to read an incredible account of that day in April as told in Ari’s own words. I recorded Ari over about seven different interview sessions. I transcribed her words and used grammar and punctuation in a manner that will hopefully allow you to more authentically hear Ari (a six-year-old child) tell her story. The drawings are hers and were collected and reproduced from pages that she wrote and drew on over this past year. Kim Hunt, a teacher in Ari’s current school, donated her time to provide the additional artwork for the book.

Ari dictated the poem in the front of the book to her Grandmother (Nanny) a few months after her parents died. Her grandmother, also Jennifer’s mother, (after penning Ari’s poem on the paper we copied for you to read) found the poem that’s printed in the back of the book among Jennifer’s personal items. Jennifer wrote the poem when she was twelve years old and Ari had never seen it. The titles are the same and the thoughts written by two different children decades apart are quite profound.

The title, *To Heaven After the Storm*, of course specifically refers to Ari's experiences during and after the April 27th tornados of 2011. Its application, however, can be to many of us as we travel through this sometimes stormy life...the promise of Heaven is there for us.

Lisa Reburn

Ari, Kim and I hope you and your children love her story...

All proceeds from the sale of this book go to Treasure Boxes
Foundation to grow support for grieving children and orphans.

Facebook.com/ToHeavenAfterTheStorm
www.ToHeavenAfterTheStorm.com

Lisa

Kim

Ari



Ari dictated this poem to her Grandmother (Nanny) a few months after her parents died. Her grandmother, also Jennifer's mother, (after penning Ari's poem on this paper) found the poem that's printed in the back of the book among Jennifer's personal items. Jennifer wrote the poem when she was twelve years old and Ari had never seen it. The titles are the same and the thoughts written by two different children decades apart are quite profound.

God is Always There

The angels who guide us will make sure we are safe. The angels help us through our harms. They will let God know when we are upset. He knows everything ~~even~~ that we see. You pray and things will get better as you go. God is always watching us. He will take care of every thing. Don't worry. God can do more than you can. Mr. Hallmark imagine.



Nanny had come over that morning before it happened and we already had everything set up in the bathroom of the new house for the tornado. We were watching the news (about the storms) before Daddy came home. We didn't know that we were going to be going over there to Maw Maw's. We had pillows and blankets and my sleeping bag in the bathroom just in case I wanted to take a nap in there. My Daddy was still outside working with the chicken houses trying to get the chickens ready for the storm. He saw the wind blowing really bad over in their (Maw Maw's) direction. He quit work cause he knew it was gonna be real bad weather. He came inside our new house where my Mom was making some tea. We talked about the little babies (Ari's twin 17-month-old cousins) being over at Maw Maw's and decided to go there and bring them all back to our house.

mom side gets put some blankets
and pillows in the bathroom.

Dad side lets go get
them. ♡



When we got there, I heard the sirens. I could hear the man talking. I know it wasn't real close to our house, but I did hear it. Mama had dropped her phone on the way carrying me in and she didn't even stop to get it...we didn't really care about it then! My Dad and Paw Paw went out to get a flashlight. The power went out right before it hit us. Julie (one of the twins) was laughing; she didn't know. Jayden (her other twin cousin) was crying like I was. We were all in the bathroom. We tried to get Pepper (the dog) in there. Pepper just wouldn't come in! They never did find Pepper...

going to mawmaws house.



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