

Meet Ilyas. His arrival to our family brought chaos, frustration and mayhem. He demanded to be seen and heard. Yet this traumatized young boy inserted himself as a fixture into our family and penetrated our hearts. This is our story. His and ours.

**ALL ABOUT ILYAS:
A Story about Raising a Foster Child**

by APRIL MARTIN

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All About

Ilyas

April Martin

Praise for “All About Ilyas”

“All About Ilyas” is the fascinating and touching story of a distrusting young child who had the good fortune to be raised by loving foster parents. Having lived a traumatic childhood, Ilyas could be a bright and loving child one minute and an out of control, self-destructive one the next, set off by the slightest thing. Written from the journals his foster mother kept with excerpts from Ilyas’ writing and art, adds dimension, humor and sadness to the story. It is written from her soul and the reader experiences her frustration, and near-hopelessness as well as humor and success on Ilyas’ journey. Every parent, psychologist and teacher should read this book to get insight into child behavior and methods for handling a difficult child.

Linda Payne Smith
Creative Writing Instructor
Educator for 48 years

I could not stop reading this book and just finished. I am full of so many emotions right now, but the most powerful one is love. It was amazing from start to finish and left me wanting more.

Christy Foster – Teacher

I was so moved by your very special documentary of Ilyas. I began reading and never stopped until I finished. I think it would be a wonderful and educational book for anyone thinking of becoming a foster parent.

Mendy Wynn – Social Worker

I have read this book three times and I cried every time. This is a powerful and important story.

Christine Rosa – Educator

My experience has been that parents don’t want to tell the difficult side of foster care because we don’t like hearing “You brought this on yourself.” There are not enough people who understand that we can love doing foster care and hate it at the same time. Not want to do it anymore but do it anyway. There are not enough people who are willing to be uncomfortable for the sake of a child to have stability.

Lindsey Danielle – Foster Parent

This is a wonderful book. I could not stop once I started and read it right through. I am touched, impressed and more than a little emotional.

James Patton - Attorney

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Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individual.

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Journal Entry #14

The Quesadilla Diet

I went to "Back to School" night. Ilyas has a teacher that we are familiar with. She is firm and academic, so a good fit for him. With all the parents seated in their students half sized desks, I raised my hand. I introduced myself as Ilyas' foster mom, and a parent that was well known in the community, but not as much with this generation of parents. I explained that although he is a foster child, he lives in a stable, and loving environment. I told them he had a big heart, wants to have friends, and was turning over a new leaf this year. Last year he had a bad reputation (well deserved) and was never invited to any play dates or birthday parties. After the meeting, several parents came up to me and said their child had mentioned that Ilyas had changed a lot and was more fun to be with. We set up a few play dates and some promises to birthday parties.

We are falling into a sort of routine. Good days and bad days, but more good than bad days. He is on the swim team now and swims twice a week. He looks forward to those days and has won several ribbons at the meets. They are prized possessions. They hang in his room and he proudly shows them to everyone that comes over. At school, he has won several awards for behavior and one for being the most improved student. These awards are presented in front of the entire school at an assembly. He is also very proud of these awards. He hasn't been suspended once so far (it's just been two months) and hasn't even been benched during recess.

But the power struggles continue at home. Right now, dinners have become ridiculous. What happened to the kid that ate everything? He will take forever to finish his food, even though it was something he gladly ate a week ago. He will eat one item and leave the rest. All a fight for power. Who will win? The adult of course.

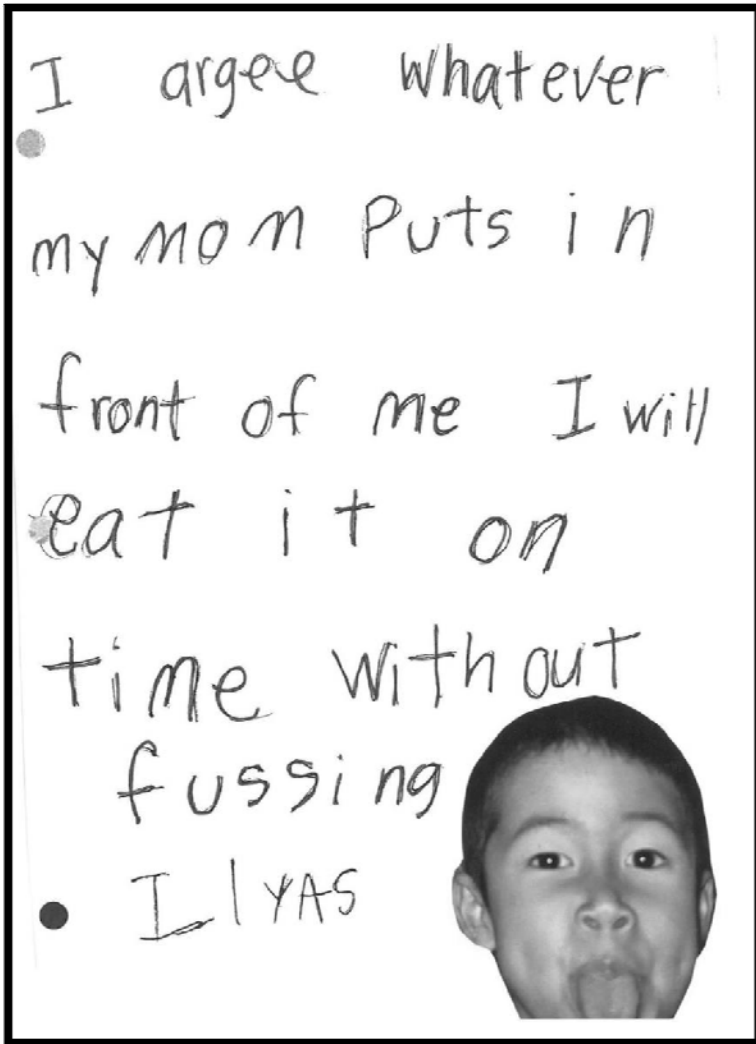
So I came up with what I call the "quesadilla diet." I asked him what I could give him that he will love and eat willingly? I told him I

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felt bad, and I was tired of forcing food on him. He looked pretty smug and replied that his favorite food was a quesadilla.

Acting like I was catering to his whim, I made him a quesadilla while serving the rest of the family something else. He ate it with a satisfied look on his face. The next morning for breakfast, I placed a quesadilla in front of him, and exclaimed how lucky he was that he got his favorite food for breakfast too. Then I told him that I had packed him one for lunch! Wasn't he the lucky boy. After school, I made him one for snack and another quesadilla for dinner, while serving a different dinner to the rest of the family. He was stumped. He knew he had to eat it, since he had made the big deal of not liking anything else, but he looked longingly at the pasta we were having.

At breakfast the next morning, he broke. He didn't want a quesadilla, he wanted pancakes like everyone else. Before we could begin a new issue over food, I had him write up an agreement that he would eat whatever food was out in front of him. We keep it posted in the kitchen.



I agree whatever
my mom puts in
front of me I will
eat it on
time without
fussing
• ILYAS

Children in foster care frequently have problems in the area of eating. Children who have not been fed regularly or consistently may develop a survival mentality toward food. When children are not fed reliably, do not get enough food, or have to compete for enough, they become anxious. When food-insecure children do have access to food, they often don't trust that it is coming again in adequate amounts.

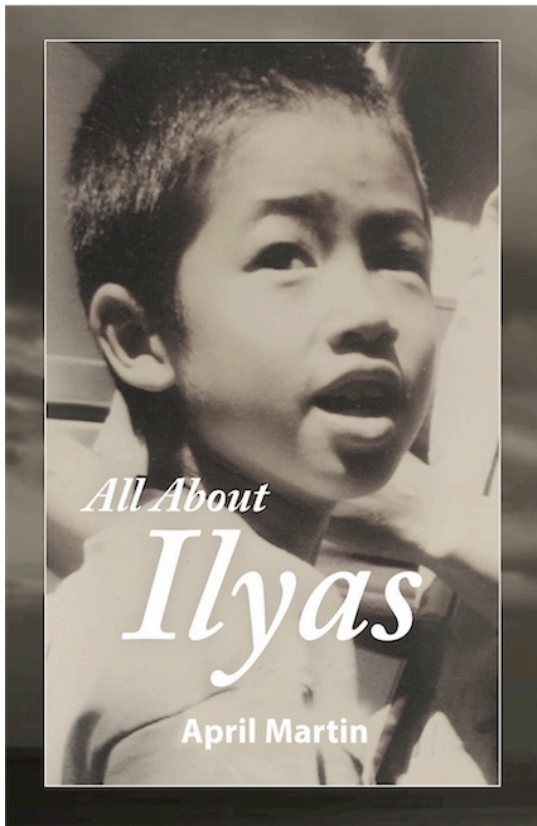
All About Ilyas

Some children approach food with a "vacuum" mentality-- that is, eat as much as you can as fast as you can! Some children have a survival mentality that makes them anxious around food. If they haven't been able to count on regularly or consistently being fed, many children will eat as much as they can when food is available. They may become anxious if they think others are getting more food than they are. Other children can't tell when they are full and may eat until they vomit.

Some children may hide or hoard food in the room. Sometimes this food isn't even edible, such as stale sandwiches or mushy, molding fruit. Hoarding food stems from emotional anxiety or want. On some level, children may feel that they can't get enough because they haven't been able to get enough. They may feel less anxious if they have stashed some food.

Ilyas hid food in his room. Under his pillow, under his bed and in his shoes in his closet. It often was food from our snack box (always open and available), but sometimes I would find a half of a sandwich or part of some fruit. I didn't really address this issue head on. When I found food or wrappers, I just cleaned them up and made sure he knew there was food available at all times. Even during the "quesadilla diet," he had access to the snack box and drinks in the refrigerator.

We continued to have food issues with Ilyas, even with him holding food in his cheeks for hours before chewing and swallowing. I just pretended that I didn't notice most of the time, and he seemed embarrassed and self-conscious of the behavior himself. I noticed he wouldn't look at me and he avoided conversation when his mouth was full, probably thinking I wouldn't notice. I mostly wanted to diffuse any more food related power struggles with him.



Meet Ilyas. His arrival to our family brought chaos, frustration and mayhem. He demanded to be seen and heard. Yet this traumatized young boy inserted himself as a fixture into our family and penetrated our hearts. This is our story. His and ours.

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