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Esperanza

MEET THE
DOERINGS
A LOVE
MEANT
TO BE

PHOTO BY
JOSHUA MICHAEL
PHOTOGRAPHY





MEANT FOR EACH OTHER

FOR **JULIE DOERING** AND HER SON, **HENRY**, FAMILY BEGAN WITH A TINY BABY, AN OPEN HEART AND A FAITH THAT SOME THINGS ARE SIMPLY MEANT TO BE.

PHOTOS BY
JOSHUA MICHAEL PHOTOGRAPHY

WHEN JULIE DOERING FIRST WALKED INTO THE HOME SHE WOULD EVENTUALLY BUY IN ESPERANZA, SHE HAD A FEELING THERE WAS SOMETHING MORE WAITING FOR HER THERE.

The four-bedroom house with a den seemed like an awfully big home. But Julie, who had already opened her heart and home to children who needed a safe place to land, wondered if perhaps God had plans for those extra rooms.

"I thought, I think God wants me to take more kids," she remembers.

About six months later, Julie felt an unmistakable prompting to prepare herself to foster again. She completed the certification process in just ten weeks. Thirty-six hours after she was approved, the call came.

"Come get your baby."

That baby was Henry.

Born two months prematurely and exposed to drugs before birth, Henry had spent the first days of his life in the NICU. He was just 15 days old when Julie met him. She remembers walking in and seeing a tiny baby lying alone in his hospital isolette with no stuffed animal or special blanket beside him. She picked him up and held him for hours.

When it was finally time to put him down, Henry had other ideas.

"He screamed," Julie recalls with a laugh. "It was like he was saying, 'Don't you dare leave me.'"

So she held him a little longer.

The next day, after Henry passed the required car-seat test for premature infants, Julie brought home her four-pound baby boy.

"He's been my child ever since."

Those first weeks were not easy. Henry experienced significant withdrawal symptoms, and Julie stayed beside him through all of it. Looking back, she believes those difficult early days created a bond between them that became almost inseparable.

Today, that tiny baby is an energetic little boy who turns four in October, and the Doering home is filled with his laughter, curiosity and unmistakable personality.

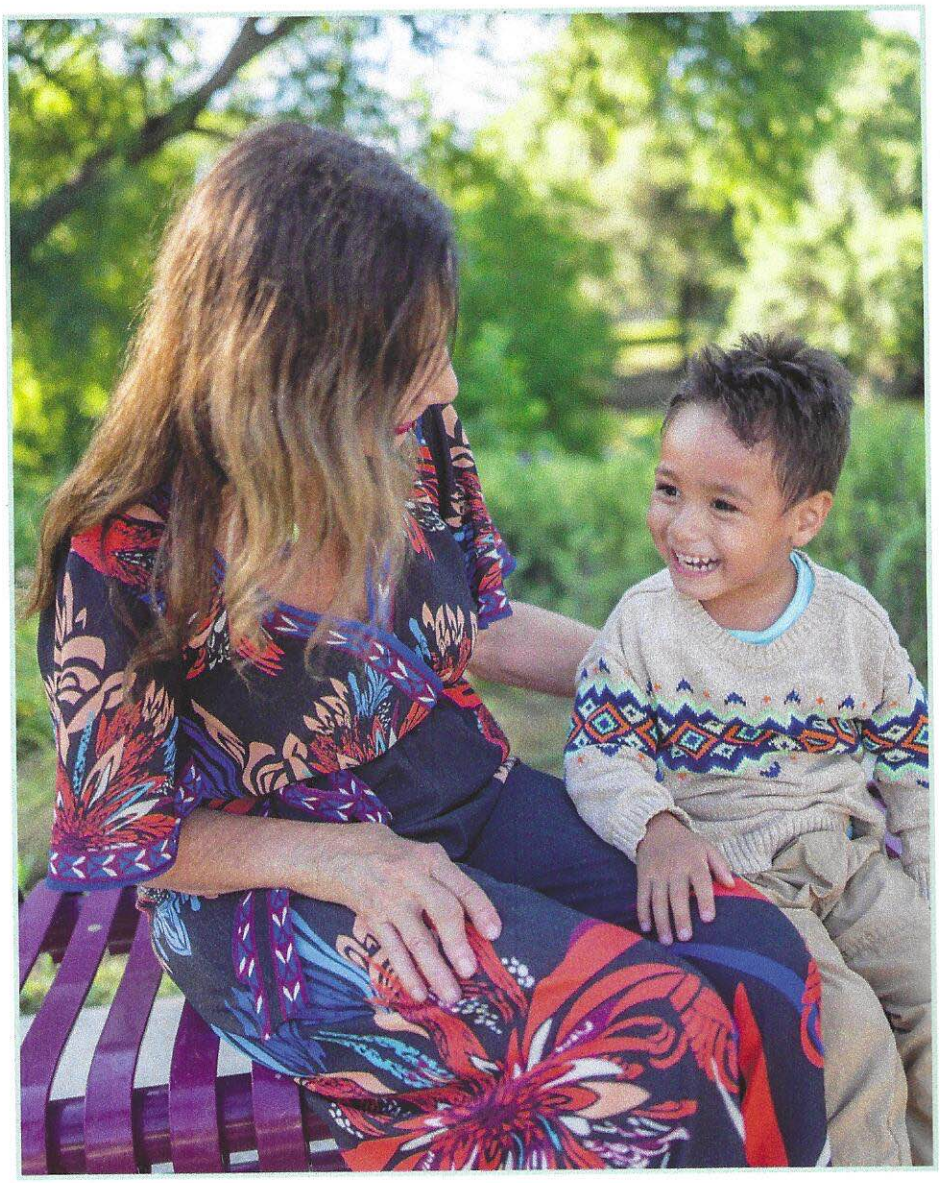
"He is my sweet, amazing boy," Julie says. "He is a bundle of joy and always willing to laugh and have fun."

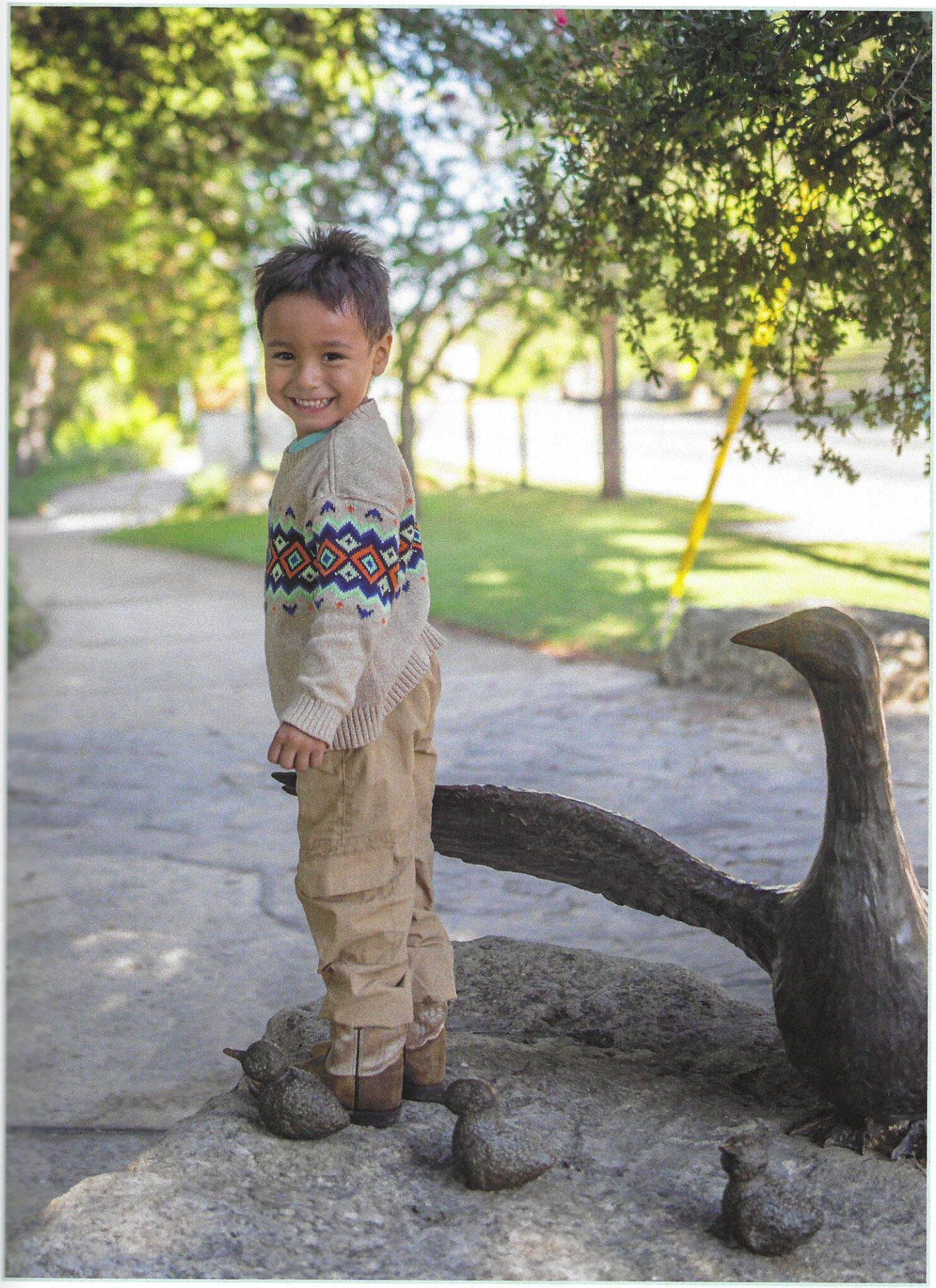
Henry faces some neurological challenges related to his premature birth and prenatal exposure, but Julie has devoted herself to learning how to best support him. Over the years, she has participated in support groups and specialized training to better understand children with unique developmental needs.

But when Julie talks about Henry, challenges are never the first thing you hear.

You hear about the little boy who loves books just as much as cartoons. The boy who rides his scooter through the neighborhood, loves swimming in their backyard pool and thinks hot dogs and mangoes make a pretty terrific meal.

You hear about a little boy fascinated by the people who come running when someone needs help.







Every few weeks, Julie takes Henry to visit local fire, police or ambulance stations, where he gets to spend time with the "superheroes" in his community. After getting to know an EMT named Mr. Josh, Henry has already announced his future career plans: he wants to be a firefighter and EMT.

Life for Julie and Henry is built around simple traditions that have become uniquely theirs. On Saturdays, they make the drive into San Antonio for Indian food at Tandoori Palace, a ritual they rarely miss. They swim, garden, walk along the river, visit the Esperanza lazy river and splash pad and occasionally set off on bigger adventures. Together, they have traveled to Cozumel and visited the Mayan ruins.

A perfect day, though, doesn't require going far. It begins early with Julie studying her Bible while Henry plays nearby. Then they make breakfast together. Henry has learned to make scrambled eggs and helps pull the bacon from the package. They may head outside to pick vegetables from Julie's garden, produce she often shares with neighbors.

Later might come a trip through the car wash, visiting a favorite restaurant for lunch, grocery shopping and an afternoon swim. They might grill dinner on the patio and end the evening watching a favorite show.

And then comes Julie's favorite part.

"Henry falls asleep in my arms," she says.

It is in those quiet moments that the enormity of their story seems to settle into something beautifully ordinary: a mother holding her son at the end of another day.

Sometimes, in the middle of the night, Henry snuggles closer, pats her gently and says, "I love you, Mommy."

"He's a boy of few words," Julie says, "so all of those words coming out mean so much to me."

> "HE IS MY SWEET, **AMAZING BOY**. HE IS A BUNDLE OF JOY AND ALWAYS WILLING TO LAUGH AND HAVE FUN."

Julie has spent much of her life serving others. An ordained minister, teacher, author and artist, she has written books on spirituality and personal growth and has devoted more than 35 years to helping people. Over the past decade, much of that heart for service has been poured into children. Henry is one of four children Julie has welcomed into her home at different times. He is the one who stayed forever.

Their journey to Esperanza began after Julie left California following devastating wildfires, smoke damage, isolation and the pandemic. She packed the car and began driving toward a new life without knowing exactly where it would be.

When she reached San Antonio, she felt God telling her to stop.

Soon afterward, she found Esperanza and the house she felt had been waiting for her.

Six years later, that once-too-big house makes perfect sense.

It is the home where a four-pound baby became a joyful little boy. Where tomatoes grow in the garden, a scooter races down the street and a swimming pool provides endless summer afternoons. It is where breakfast is made by little hands and where a sleepy child still curls up safely in his mother's arms.

Julie has known tremendous joys and tremendous difficulties in her life. Through all of it, gratitude remains at the center.

"I'm very, very grateful for my son," she says. "For our home, our friendships and just having this opportunity to be here at this moment in time."

Sometimes a home finds its family.

And sometimes, two people find each other and somehow know, almost from the very beginning:

You are mine, and I am yours.

Do you know the perfect Esperanza family for us to feature? If so, email Kelley at kelley.grose@n2co.com.

