

# Maybe Tomorrow

Nancy Alspaugh-Jackson comes home – and enlists Robbin Thompson to fight autism

**F**ormer Richmonder Nancy Alspaugh-Jackson was surprised to see a Facebook friend request from singer/songwriter Robbin Thompson. The two had met in Richmond in the 1970s when Thompson was lead singer in Bruce Springsteen's Steel Mill band. He contacted her after seeing a Facebook picture of her and Springsteen.

She had no idea that reconnecting would lead Thompson to write the theme song, *Maybe Tomorrow*, for a new campaign to raise funds for military families with autistic children.

Alspaugh-Jackson, a former television executive and author, was back in Richmond recently to visit family – and to talk about a new campaign.

She now serves as the executive director of the national nonprofit ACT Today! (Autism Care and Treatment Today), which is dedicated to providing funds to families who cannot afford or access the treatments needed for their autistic children. The organization's new campaign is ACT Today! For Military Families.

## RICHMOND DAYS, MATT LAUER AND BOOMER BABES

Before assuming her current role, Alspaugh-Jackson was an Emmy-winning television producer for a variety of shows, including network talk shows for actress/comedian Vicki Lawrence of *The Carol Burnett Show* and *Mama's Family* and television host Leeza Gibbons. She also was vice president of production for Westinghouse Productions, which pioneered the *PM Magazine* format.

Alspaugh-Jackson, a Virginia Commonwealth University graduate, started her television career at WCVE in Richmond. Her family had moved to the area when she was in middle school. "Walking into television, I felt like I was where I belong," she says. "I was the only girl on an eight-person crew, and the crew taught me everything."

She was later hired to produce segments at WXEX (now WRIC) for the syndicated *PM Magazine* show, where she met Matt Lauer, now co-host of NBC's *Today*. Lauer and she later married; they divorced in 1989. Alspaugh-Jackson is now married to Fox Sports television executive Read Jackson.

After leaving television in 2000, she began writing books that focused on women and midlife. She also wrote and performed in the stage show *Boomer Babes*.

## SON'S AUTISM LEADS TO ACTION

Her focus changed in 2003 when her 2-year-old son, Wyatt, started having developmental problems. "He was developing normally and then regressed. I didn't know what was wrong. He was having massive tantrums," Alspaugh-Jackson says.

Wyatt was diagnosed with autism at the age of 3½. In doing research, Alspaugh-Jackson learned about applied behavior analysis, a therapy that helps children with autism by teaching them behavioral skills. "When I heard about it, I started doing fundraising," she says. "In my first two years with ACT Today!, we gave out over \$300,000 in grants to families needing services."

Her son began receiving services when he was 5. "We started seeing great improvements," she says. "I knew I had to help other families access this, so I devoted my time to finding answers."

She started ACT Today! For Military Families after learning that one in 88 children in military families has autism and less than 10 percent receive the recommended care and treatment.

"Every time a family moves to a new state, they face long wait lists for state Medicaid assistance," explains Alspaugh-Jackson, who sees a growing need in health care services for families at Fort Lee.

## TARGET: VIRGINIA

The army base's population is expected to more than double in the next year or two. "Sometimes, like in the state of Virginia, the wait can extend up to 10 years or more for their child to receive supplemental help."

Her goal is to raise \$1 million to fund treatment and care until policy change can be addressed. She's hoping Thompson's song, *Maybe Tomorrow*, will help raise some of that money. The song grew out of their Facebook conversations, in which she mentioned she was looking for theme music.

"I told her to send me something to inspire me," Thompson says.

She forwarded him a link to an interview with Karen Driscoll, a military wife whose husband has completed two combat deployments and whose child has autism. The emotional story about fighting a silent war at home had immediately resonated with Alspaugh-Jackson, who comes from a military family.

Thompson was equally touched by its honesty – and wrote the song. "I played it for Nancy when she came to Richmond to see her parents," he says, "and she was moved. It became part of her campaign."

She says she was more than just moved.

"When Robbin played it, I sobbed," Alspaugh-Jackson says. "It connects to every mother's struggle. It's my story. I felt those feelings of, who can help me?" **B**



Alspaugh-Jackson and Thompson  
Photography by Bob Jones, Jr.

Joan Tupponce is a Richmond-based freelance writer.

- For more, visit [www.acttodayformilitaryfamilies.org](http://www.acttodayformilitaryfamilies.org).
- To download *Maybe Tomorrow*, visit [www.cdbaby.com/cd/RobbinThompson](http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/RobbinThompson).