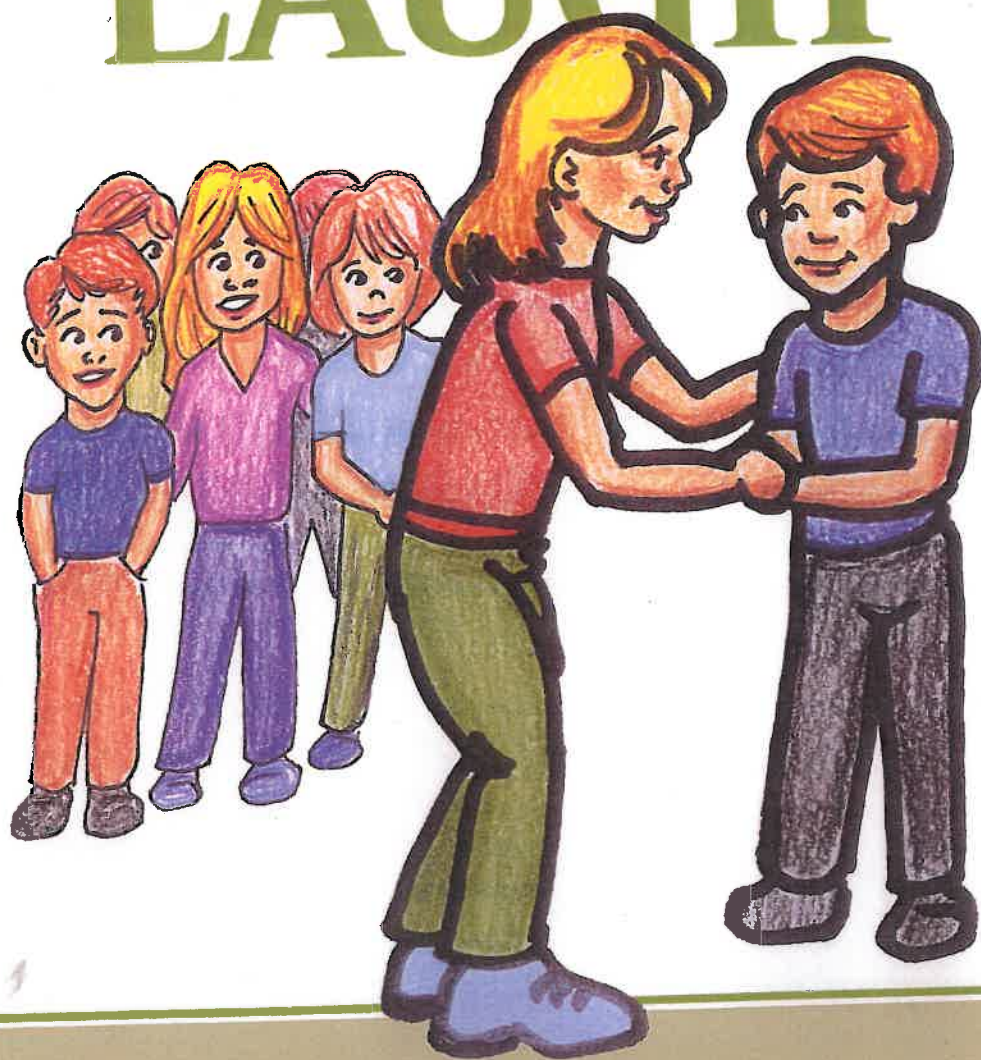


— BUT —  
**MICHAEL**  
MAKES ME  
**LAUGH**



BY LORI STETINA  
ILLUSTRATED BY MICHELLE BURGESS

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Interagency FAS Program  
Lori Stetina

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— BUT —  
**MICHAEL**  
MAKES ME  
**LAUGH**

BY LORI STETINA  
ILLUSTRATED BY MICHELLE BURGESS

This book is intended to provide basic information and encourage discussion  
on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders for young children in the classroom.

## **THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO**

My daughter Leigh-Anne (Boo) who is destined to do great things. You make parenting look easy. Your independence and self-discipline inspires me.

My son Ryan for whom this book was written. I have learned more from you than you will ever learn from me.  
Shine bright my little star.

This is a story about a boy named Michael.  
Michael is 5 years old.

Michael is a great swimmer. Michael is an excellent runner. Michael knows his numbers very well. He can count up to 100 and he knows the whole alphabet.

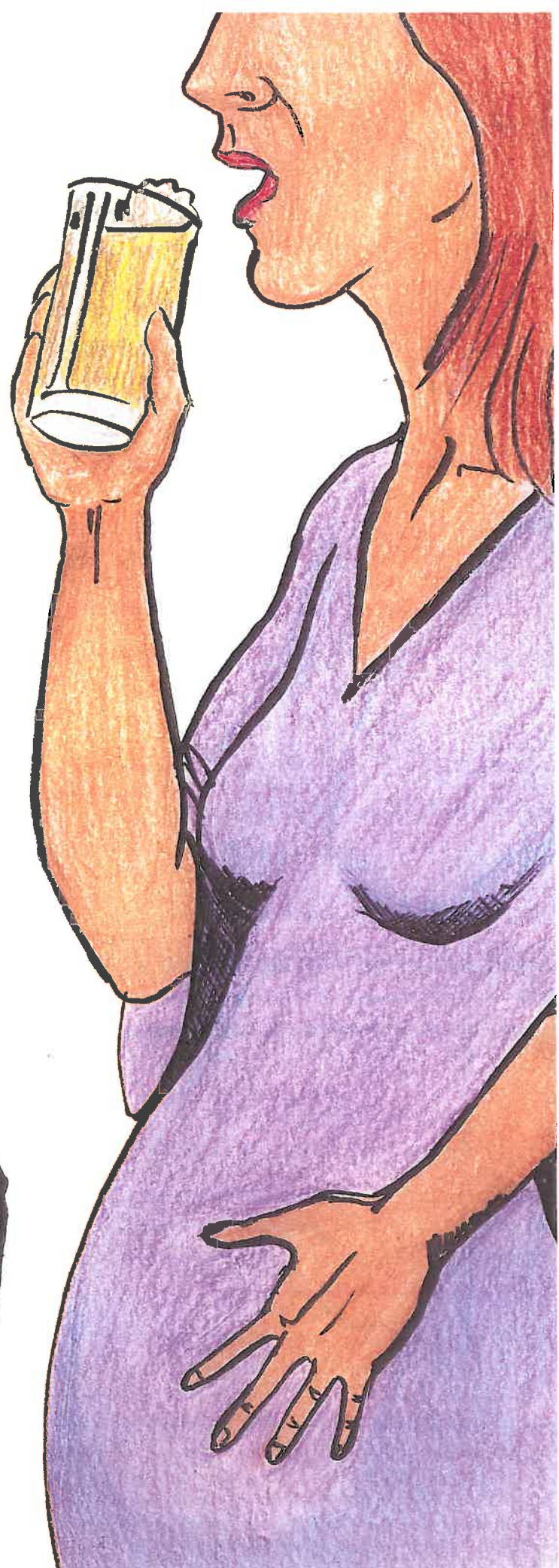
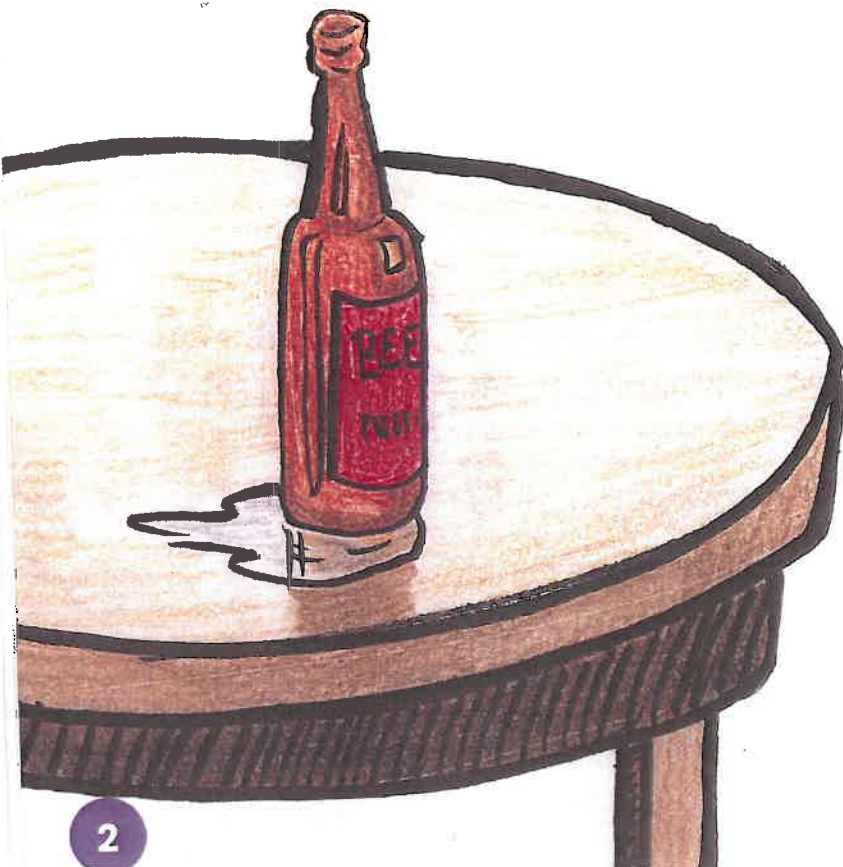
Michael also has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or FAS.





FAS means that Michael's birth mother drank some "grown-up" drinks called alcohol while Michael was growing in her tummy.

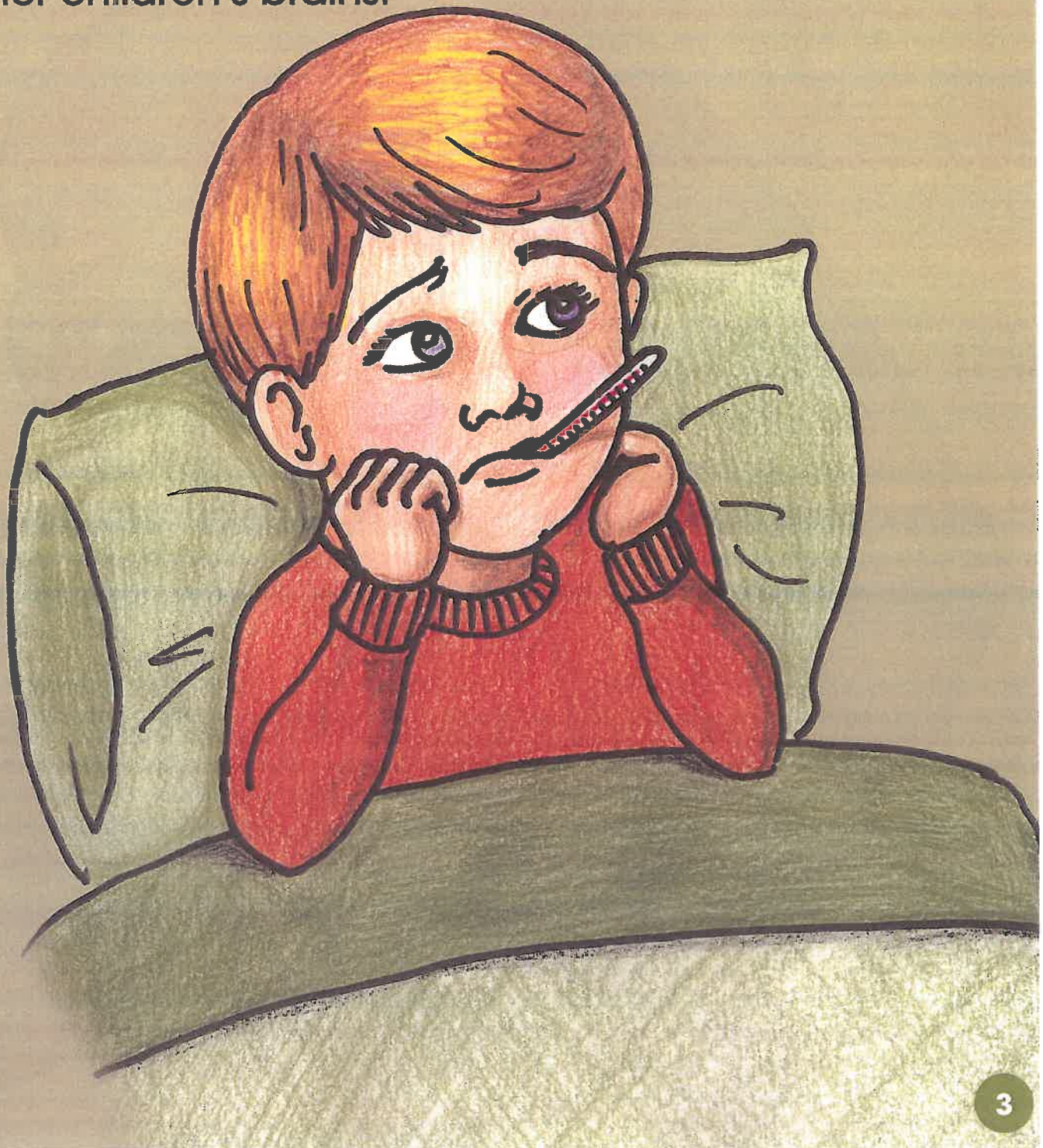
She didn't realize that this would hurt her baby, or that the damage it did would last forever.





When Michael was born he was very small.  
He had difficulty eating and he got sick a lot.

As Michael got older, he found that he did things  
that other children did not do. That is because  
certain parts of his brain worked differently than  
other children's brains.





He had a hard time remembering some things.  
Pictures often helped him to remember.

Sometimes, the part of his brain that reminded  
him not to hit or punch others didn't work properly,  
and he forgot.





Sometimes, Michael's brain got mixed up and he just needed to go for a walk or to a quiet place that he knew very well.

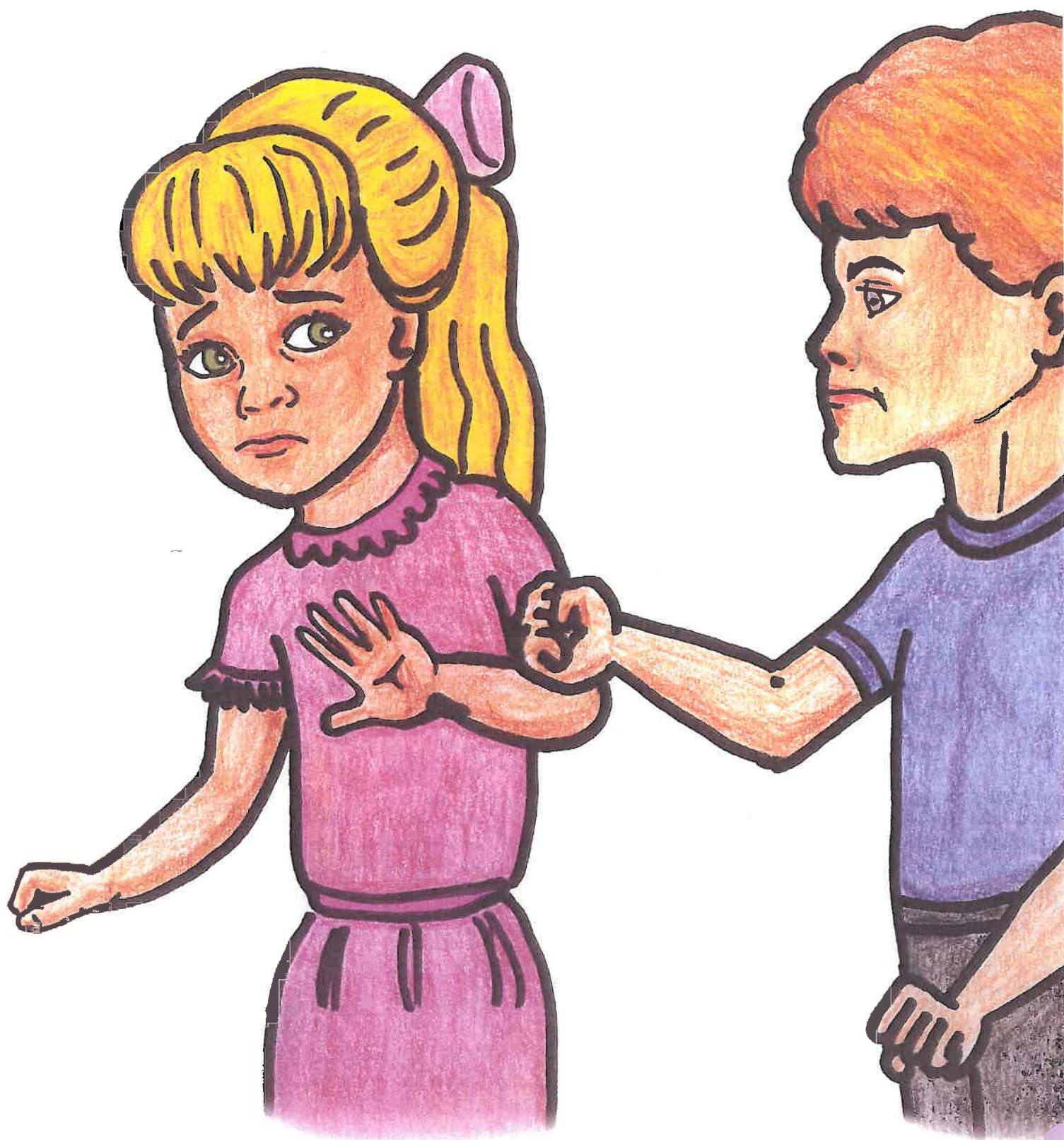


One day at school, Michael hit three kids in his class.

He didn't mean to hit them, but his brain forgot to remind him that hitting is unacceptable.

The kids that he hit were very angry, even though they didn't think that Michael meant to hit them.







The same day, Michael got frustrated and tore up a picture he was making.





Then he did the unthinkable! He yelled at his teacher and ran out of the classroom.

The teacher knew that Michael couldn't help it, but she was getting upset too!



Michael was having a bad day. He hated having FAS. It made some things so difficult.

Well, the principal finally caught up with Michael in the hall. By this time, half the class was angry with Michael and his teacher was frustrated too. They decided that perhaps Michael needed a "time-out."

Just as the teacher's helper was taking Michael by the hand to leave the classroom, one of the little girls, who hadn't said a single word all year, stood up and said,

"But Michael makes me laugh!"





Everyone stopped and turned.

Another child stood up and said, "Yes. I like Michael. He makes me laugh too and he's a good colourer."

Someone else said, "He's got such a sweet smile and even though he's small, he sure can run fast!"

"He's a good counter and he helps me do puzzles," said another child.

The teacher smiled. She was pleased and proud that she had such a caring class. They understood about FAS. They could see that Michael was more like them than he was different and that he just needed some good friends to understand his differences.

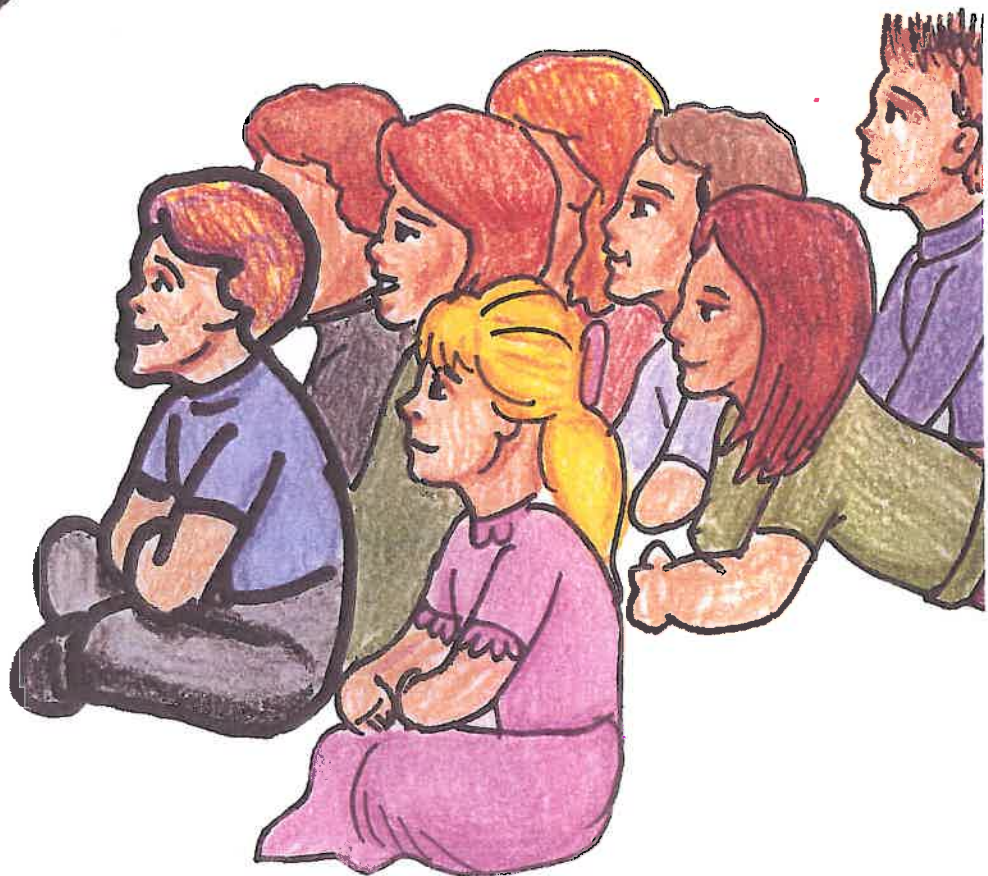








By this time, Michael felt better,  
and he sat quietly in his place  
while the teacher read the  
class a story.





## DEAR READER

We hope that you and your class enjoy this story. It is our hope that you and your students may come to understand more about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and some of the unique strengths and challenges faced by those who are alcohol affected.

When reading this story, please feel free to substitute the name "Michael" with "Michelle" if that is more appropriate. Please do not use the child's actual name unless you have the consent of the child's caregiver. In this story one of Michael's greatest strengths was his sense of humour and the gift of laughter that he gave to other students. If there is a child who is alcohol affected in your class, feel free to insert his or her unique strengths and skills into the story (i.e. great with computers, loves to draw or read, is a fast runner, likes to help other students and teachers, etc.) It is important that you work together with the child's caregiver and receive their permission and ideas when putting together this disability awareness program. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is a disability just as Down Syndrome, Spina Bifida, and Cerebral Palsy are disabilities. The difference is that FAS is more of a "hidden disability" and to the untrained eye there may be few physical indications that something is different about the way the brain takes in and processes information. It is important that we move from seeing behavior and learning differences as a matter of *won't* to a matter of *can't* due to the brain differences of this disability.

By sharing this story and the stories of others who are alcohol affected, you are helping to increase not only awareness but also understanding for those who are affected by and living with FAS.

For additional information about FAS, services for families, and substance misuse please call

FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME INFORMATION MANITOBA

Toll Free at 1-866-877-0050



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Lori Stetina** was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has one grown daughter, Leigh-Anne and a young son Ryan, whom she adopted. Ryan has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

When Ryan reached school age, Lori discovered that there were virtually no educational materials available to teach young children about the social dynamics and implications of FAS. She wanted Ryan to be schooled in a loving and supportive environment, not only by his teachers and school administrators but by his peers as well.

*But Michael Makes Me Laugh* is a story that was inspired by Ryan and written to help his classmates understand his challenges but has since become an educational tool that Lori has used in other grades and in other schools to heighten awareness and increase understanding of this largely invisible disability.

Lori's sister Michelle is the artist who's wonderful pictures helped bring this story to life.