A Mother’s Perspective
Prior to moving to Houston, Ansley attended kindergarten in a state where the approach to learning to read was more developmental in nature. At the end of her kindergarten year, Ansley was an emerging but definitely not full-fledged reader. I was not too concerned about this because I felt Ansley was a smart girl and would quickly pick up on reading in first grade.

Houston, we have a problem! The problem was that we moved to Houston right after Labor Day of her first-grade year. Ansley was placed in a gifted and talented class with a veteran teacher. It was evident after peeking through the window of the classroom that the other students were quite sufficient readers, and Ansley looked like a lost soul when she was left on her own in the classroom.

Over the next few months, it was obvious to me that Ansley was struggling. Each paper that came home in the dreaded Tuesday folder indicated that Ansley’s skills were far below grade level. She started to feel reluctant about going to school, and my happy-go-lucky little girl was becoming sad and insecure. She even told me that her favorite classmate was getting fed up with having to constantly explain class work. I think the straw that broke the camel’s back was when Ansley brought home a spelling test with every word spelled incorrectly, even the word I. I knew I had to find some help for my daughter.

Fortunately I had a friend who knew a principal in the district. This friend asked the principal if there was anything the school could offer a struggling first-grade student who had not yet learned to read and was slipping further and further behind each day. This principal told my friend about Reading Recovery.

I had never heard of Reading Recovery, so my friend explained everything she knew about it. It sounded like the answer to my prayers! I was cautioned that there was a big chance my daughter might not be able to be served in the program because there was only one Reading Recovery teacher on the campus. That meant that a very limited number of students would have the opportunity to benefit from this intervention. I couldn’t wait to call Mrs. Baker, Ansley’s teacher. She said that the Reading Recovery teacher had just

Where Are They Now?
Ansley Boarman: Defeated First Grader to Confident Graduate

Ansley remembers feeling intimidated because she couldn’t read in first grade. Reading Recovery lessons gave her a sense of confidence.

The butterfly picture below was a gift from Ansley to Cyndi at the end-of-year celebration, “along with a set of butterfly chimes that hung on my patio until they completely fell apart,” Cyndi recalls.
asked for the names of students who needed additional support in reading, and she had already submitted Ansley’s name.

What a miracle! Ansley was chosen for Reading Recovery. She started at the beginning of December, reading at Level 4. Over the next 12 weeks Ansley worked hard; her amazing Reading Recovery teacher, Cyndi Blatzer, worked hard; her patient first-grade teacher, Nancy Baker, worked hard; and we worked hard at home. It was truly a team effort, with Cyndi as the point guard. As the weeks went by, Ansley’s confidence started to improve, her grades were better, and most importantly, Ansley was becoming a reader. A real reader! In 12 short weeks, Ansley made tremendous progress and was reading at Level 18 when her Reading Recovery lessons were discontinued.

After exiting Reading Recovery in the spring of first grade, Ansley continued to soar with her reading and her grades. She went from being an uncertain and insecure first grader to a confident, fun-loving student who was eager to learn all she could. Now she is a senior and will graduate from Clements High School in 2013 with a straight-A average! She was able to accomplish these scholarly grades while spending at least 4 hours a day on the tennis court as a state-ranked tennis player.

I don’t want to even imagine what Ansley’s school years would have been like without the benefits of Reading Recovery. Her participation in this program during first grade has truly been life changing. For that, I will forever be grateful!

— Stacy Boarman

Her Reading Recovery Teacher Remembers

The first time I heard Ansley’s name was shortly after our first-round selection had been finalized. Her family had just moved into our school zone from out of state, and it didn’t take her teacher long to realize that Ansley’s reading readiness was significantly below that of her classmates. Although she was a prime candidate for Reading Recovery, the reality was that the first-round selection process was over and Ansley would have to wait several weeks for an available teaching slot.

That time period must have seemed like an eternity to Ansley. She had a caring teacher, Nancy Baker, who worked very hard, but Ansley’s progress was slow and her frustration was evident. Nancy described how quiet and withdrawn Ansley was. I was working with another student in Ansley’s class, so I was able to observe Ansley during this time and remember thinking that she always looked sad.

Finally, it was time to test some of the second-round candidates, and Ansley was at the top of the list. I found our first conversation on the way to my room that day to be a bit lopsided. I asked the questions and she responded with the fewest words possible. She was polite and respectful, but seemed guarded and uncomfortable throughout the Observation Survey.

The purpose of Roaming was beautifully demonstrated over Ansley’s first 10 days in Reading Recovery. She experienced success from day one and discovered that her time with me would always be a positive experience! I remember her as an eager and engaged student; incredibly bright and surprisingly quite the chatterbox, after all! The individualized instruction of Reading Recovery provided the power to fill the gaps in Ansley’s learning quickly, and that child took off!

We were thrilled with the changes occurring almost daily in her reading ability and in her behavior. Ansley was becoming a risk taker! With Reading Recovery, a supportive classroom environment, and supportive parents doing their part at home, Ansley became an active, engaged learner in all areas! She was hardly the quiet, withdrawn first grader that her teacher worried would be retained. She was the epitome of a Reading Recovery success story; confident and ready for second grade!

— Cyndi Blatzer
In Her Own Words

I remember vividly my worried mother hugging me goodbye outside of my first-grade classroom. I was determined to not let go, but soon enough she was gone. Within minutes of my mom being gone I was handed an Excel math worksheet. I remember staring down at the math problems and not even being able to start one because I could not read anything. Talk about intimidating! I felt like I had been thrown to a pack of wolves. Who would have known that a first-grade class could feel so vicious and uncomforting?

A few weeks went by, and I knew I was failing first grade. No one had to tell me that; I just knew it down to my core. I remember my mom working on spelling words with me in the kitchen one night, and I didn’t even know how to spell basic words like am, is, be, and I! I felt lonely, stupid, and most of all defeated.

Then I remember Mrs. Blatzer, an angel sent from heaven to help me read. She took me for 30 minutes every day to work on my reading. We started off slowly, and gradually I started to learn. My grades started to improve, and I only missed one or two words on my spelling test. I could even complete Excel math worksheets on my own!

By the end of first grade I was reading on the same level as the other first graders. Going from being a nonreader to a competent reader in less than one full school year is pretty miraculous. Mrs. Blatzer and Reading Recovery helped make that miracle happen.

Today, I play tennis on the varsity team at my high school, and I have earned straight As every year. And, I can READ! I will be going to college next year, and it will be the first time since first grade that I will be thrown into an unknown place; quite remarkable and profound.

Thank you, Reading Recovery, for making my future more luminous than I ever could have achieved on my own!

— Ansley Boarman

About the Cover

When Mark Stamper entered first grade at Kenwood Elementary in Louisville, KY, he was reading at an average level. But after several weeks, his teacher became concerned because Mark was not keeping up with his classmates in reading and writing. So she worked with Jenny Grimes, a Reading Recovery/intervention teacher, and Mark began his series of lessons as a second-round student, performing significantly behind his peers. Throughout the weeks he began to make progress, and even though the school year ended before he could complete his series of lessons, he tested on grade level! Jenny confirms that Mark has maintained his progress and continues to improve in second grade, now more confident in his reading and writing.

Mark’s proud grandmother, Betty, says he is a very caring child who loves football, basketball, and his PlayStation. “He has three sisters, so he is a special little boy in a lot of ways!” Betty said. Mark is a University of Kentucky fan and loves playing basketball at the YMCA. He is very competitive and likes to win. When he isn’t playing sports or computer game, Mark loves to read.

Our thanks to Cathy Duvall, teacher leader for Fort Bend Independent School District in Sugar Land, TX, for helping coordinate this feature.

Stacy Boarman is now a district ESL facilitator for Fort Bend ISD and says Ansley has visited several Texas universities that have offered both athletic and academic scholarships. Cyndi Blatzer is still teaching at Sienna Crossing Elementary in Fort Bend ISD, the school where she first met Stacy and Ansley.