



The Laudati Family

Embracing ADHD with a Fresh Optimism

The dynamic of the Laudati family is positively infectious. In our 40-minute video interview back in July, Jill and Adam Laudati spoke openly about their family's journey through the challenges and highlights of raising two boys with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In their book, "Itchy Brain," the family shares their experience and how they've embraced ADHD with a fresh optimism. As I listened to their story, it was clear how embedded ADHD has been in their life, and how united they've become as a family through its wake.

Jill and Adam Laudati met in 2003. Jill had just finished graduate school as a speech and language pathologist from Southern Connecticut State University. Adam had recently graduated from the University of Connecticut with a degree in management information systems and was starting a career in the insurance industry. As Jill tells the story, she attended a friend's wedding who by happenstance was to marry Adam's brother. "We met at my brother's wedding," Adam cheerfully interjected. "I was best man and didn't bring a date, and that's how I met Jill." Two

years later, in 2005, the couple married.

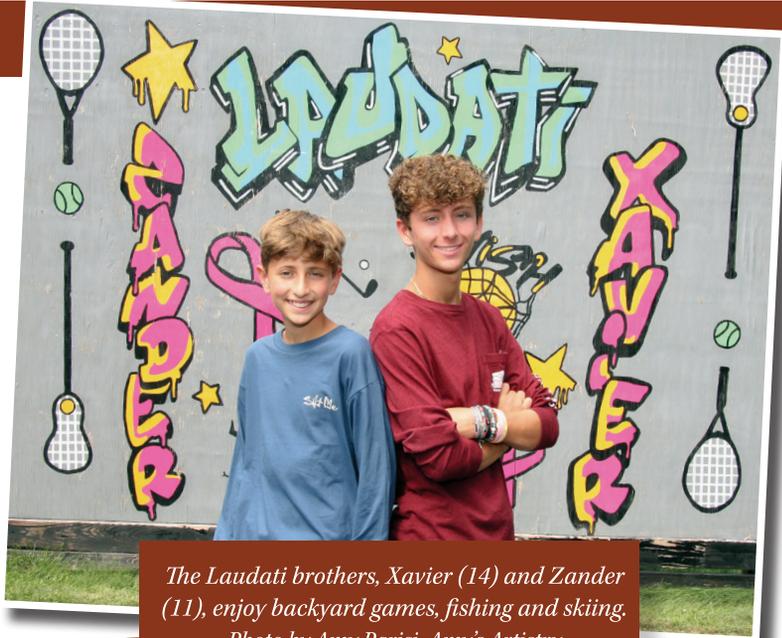
When house hunting in 2008, Jill and Adam wanted to settle somewhere in between their hometowns of North Branford and Seymour, respectively. They decided to settle in East Wallingford after a realtor introduced them to the many perks of the downtown. "Neither of us grew up in an area that had a town center as vibrant as Wallingford," Jill favorably noted. The location continues to be a convenient distance to work for Adam, who works in Hartford, and Jill, who works at the Foundation School in Orange. "We love the town and the people." Jill continued. "We've made many close friendships."

That same year, they welcomed their first son, Xavier, followed three years later by a brother, Zander, in 2011. As they nestled into their new home and started to raise a family, their story took an unforeseen direction. At a very early age, Xavier started to exhibit traits of ADHD. "He had a difficult time settling down and calming his body," Jill describes in the book. "His body was constantly moving, even when sleeping." In contrast, Zander

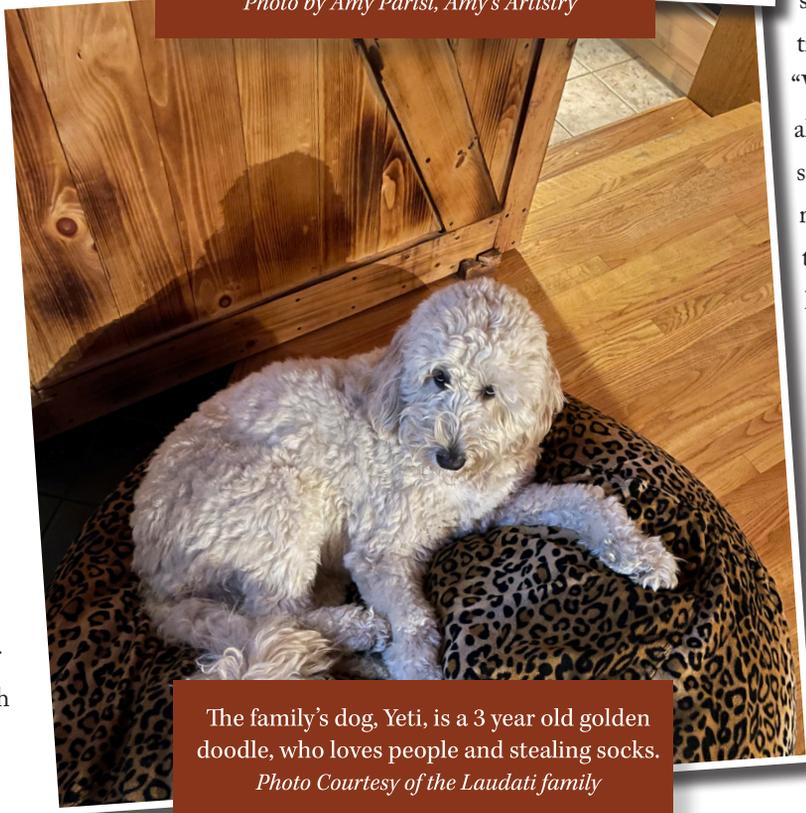
was more sedentary as an infant, but by school age, he also began to show characteristics of the disorder. As Adam was understanding the unique traits in his kids, he related all too well, since he had also exhibited traits of ADHD since childhood.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), “ADHD is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood. It is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. Children with ADHD may have trouble paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviors (may act without thinking about what the result will be), or be overly active.” Although a cause of ADHD is currently unknown, there is evidence to support that genetics plays an important

role. For Xavier, ADHD presented early on with a display of limitless energy. As Jill recalled, his body was always in motion, even while in her belly. He was also prone to emotional outbursts, especially when tired, or when something didn’t go his way. Zander, although less active than Xavier, began to exhibit a lack of focus and excessive talkativeness, coupled with anxiety. In school, both Xavier and Zander had trouble staying seated and difficulty with learning to read. All signs that pointed to the disorder.



The Laudati brothers, Xavier (14) and Zander (11), enjoy backyard games, fishing and skiing. Photo by Amy Parisi, Amy's Artistry



The family's dog, Yeti, is a 3 year old golden doodle, who loves people and stealing socks. Photo Courtesy of the Laudati family

By age 8, both brothers had an ADHD diagnosis. As Jill and Adam explained, a diagnosis provides a label for the behavior, but it’s only the beginning of understanding and applying coping strategies, which help adapt the symptoms of ADHD in a useful and more positive manner. “We’re constantly reading stuff online, or following the latest coping suggestions, but really it’s trial and error,” Jill confessed. “What works for one doesn’t always work for another.” As she mentions in the book, the most important coping strategy they taught the boys is to be honest and to communicate what they feel and need. Since kids with ADHD require teaching modifications in order to learn successfully, Jill and Adam became advocates for their sons by working with teachers to ensure they learned successfully. They spread awareness to family, friends and coaches, so that the characteristics of ADHD wouldn’t be mistaken for

disrespectful or wild mannerisms.

Unfortunately for Adam, who went undiagnosed in childhood, his intentions and actions were often misunderstood. “When I was growing up, I was that kid who had a lot of energy, and just didn’t focus.” Adam remembered. “Some [people] may have labeled me as a brat, or not well behaved.” A director of operations at Travelers Insurance, Adam now speaks candidly about his experiences with ADHD through an employee disability network. As a successful professional, he shares the coping skills he’s developed over the years to overcome the



A FAMILY'S PERSPECTIVE AND POSITIVE OUTLOOK ON ADHD

J.A. Laudati M.S., CCC-SLP

challenges he encountered both living and working with ADHD. "I had to learn as I go. Especially at work. I have post it notes all over my monitor." Adam professed. "In the workplace it's about being organized. Jill, who has worked with a variety of special needs at a private special education school for over 19 years, understands the hidden symptoms of the disorder. "Since ADHD doesn't present with one obvious behavior," Jill explained, "it takes a parent, teacher or peer to talk to the child and to get an understanding of what's behind the behavior."

Although Adam commended the doctors who were involved in the diagnosis, he and Jill wished to hear from other families who experienced similar challenges. "It wasn't that we wanted to do everything they did," Adam explained, "We just wanted to know that somebody else was out there, and we weren't all alone; And, that they were doing okay." This prompted the family to share their journey in the book *Itchy Brain*, which refers to how Xavier once described how his brain felt when the symptoms of ADHD would make it difficult to control his overall emotional state. The book shares how the family managed specific symptoms and challenges, and includes what coping strategies worked for them. Although Jill spearheaded the idea, she graciously gives credit to her three muses for the book's content. "Every event in this book we've gone through at some point or another." Jill



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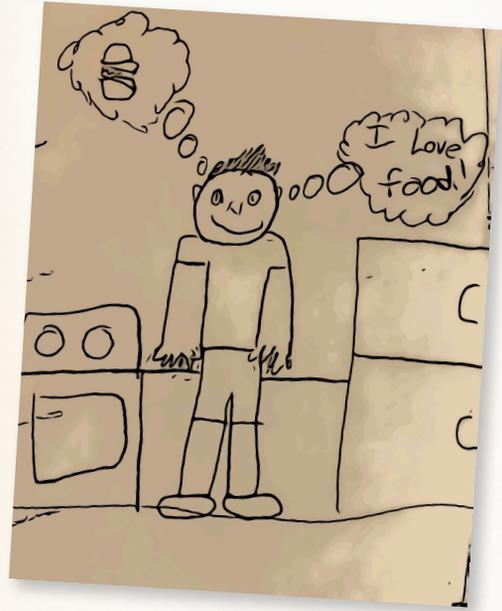


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My Brain

By Xavier Laudati • Illustration by Zander Laudati



Jill and Adam Laudati, who have been married 17 years, have lived in East Wallingford since 2008.

Photo by Amy Parisi, Amy's Artistry

assured.

As Jill and Adam began to better understand the disorder, they became more successful at funneling the unfashionable behavior into constructive activities. In doing so, they believe the behavioral characteristics of ADHD can not only be a benefit to someone with ADHD, but an advantage. “[You] say hyper-activity; We say endless energy.” Jill pitched. “[You] say living impulsively; we say living life to its fullest. The Laudatis continue to spread awareness in an effort to change the stigma attached to ADHD. In addition to the book, they’ve created different social media platforms that offer suggestions and strategies for coping with ADHD. In doing so, they hope to reach other families challenged with ADHD and offer them the comfort to know they are not alone.

*Imagine having an itchy brain
Imagine having trouble focusing
Imagine forcing yourself to be dedicated to something
Imagine when you want something all you do is talk about it
Now just imagine you want everything to go your way
Imagine not sleeping through the night
or not needing a lot of sleep
Imagine trying to focus while playing sports with ADHD
Imagine being able to play an entire soccer game
without getting tired
Imagine doing something you immediately regret
Just imagine finishing your popcorn before the movie starts
Imagine having someone tell you to “STOP” multiple times
Imagine someone reminding you
multiple times to do something
Imagine your name being called all the
time but you don’t respond
Imagine how special it is to have ADHD
Imagine having endless energy
Imagine having the drive to complete something
Imagine enjoying life and not stressing about stuff
Imagine focusing on the small stuff that gets left behind
Imagine taking risks and learning from them
I could never imagine my life without having ADHD*

Xavier Laudati wrote this poem as a 7th grader to describe what it’s like to live with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Xavier is currently a Freshman at Xavier High school, and looks forward to pursuing his interest in soccer and track & field.