

## Lisa Ackerman

**Who She Is:** This 44-year-old mother of Lauren, 24, and Jeff, 11, founded Talk About Curing Autism (TACA, [www.tacanow.org](http://www.tacanow.org)) in 2000 after her son was diagnosed with autism. TACA started with 10 families in the Ackerman living room and by last spring had grown to nearly 8,000 families nationwide.

**What She Does and Why:** “I want to get the word out that autism is treatable. Many families are told that there is no hope, no cure,” says Ackerman.

That’s the information that she and her husband, Glen, were given when their son was diagnosed. Their doctor’s suggestion that they place Jeff in an institution left Ackerman feeling like she had been doused with icy water, so she and Glen dedicated themselves to learning more.

Jeff has gone from being severely autistic to a high-functioning child who attends public school and does well academically. “He has a bright future,” Ackerman says.

TACA’s Web site and volunteers provide awareness and a community for families of autistic children, fielding about 400 calls per month. “The reason TACA was started is our family felt so alone,” Ackerman says. “Our son required constant care, and going to the store for basic necessities was a challenge.” The Orange County-based organization connects families to resources, information and support.

“I would love to not have families feel helpless and feel the loss of their child’s future by one piece of paper with the word ‘autism’ written across the top,” says Ackerman. “That feeling is awful. I want families to know autism is treatable!”



## Rebecca Grossman

**Who She Is:** Grossman, 45 and married to plastic surgeon Peter H. Grossman, M.D., is the chair of the Grossman Burn Foundation ([www.grossmanburnfoundation.org](http://www.grossmanburnfoundation.org)), the philanthropic arm of the Grossman Burn Centers. The foundation assists needy families around the world in areas of healthcare, safety and education. She’s also mother to Alexis, 4, and Nicholas, 18 months.

**What She Does and Why:** Grossman’s mother, an airline executive, was a single parent who showed Grossman and her brother the world, including impoverished areas in the South Pacific. Grossman recalls befriending kids in the jungle who lived on a diet of bananas but were happy. “I remember wanting to send Kentucky Fried Chicken to poor kids,” she says.

Today, the former journalist, researcher and marketing executive devotes countless hours to networking, writing and coordinating fundraisers for projects that benefit burn victims, children with autism and animal care. The American Heart Association named Grossman 2007 Woman of the Year for her work. And Neiman Marcus pegged the Grossman Burn Foundation as one of only four charities that will benefit from its Topanga store gala on Sept. 4.

Prior to having her own children, Grossman became legal guardian to Zubaida, a girl from Afghanistan who was horribly disfigured in a fire. Zubaida lived with the Grossmans while undergoing surgery and attending school. She has since moved back with her Afghan family.

The L.A. mom is working in partnership with Direct Relief International on the first highly specialized reconstructive surgery and burn center in Kabul, Afghanistan, scheduled to open this month.

When her children are older, Grossman plans to take them to Afghanistan and other third world countries so they can appreciate their own good fortune and learn how to reach out to others.

“Giving back is a way of life,” she says, “and it gives us a purpose.” ♦

Mimi Slawoff is a Valencia writer who moves mountains for her three children.



PHOTO BY  
MARY ANN HALPIN

**Giving back is a way of life – and it gives us a purpose.”**

– Rebecca Grossman