

# AU ASPERGER UNITED

No. 16 May 1998



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**Regular News**

**Letters and Pen Pals**

**Features** Nicola Wills discusses making judgements about other people and Theresa Dann talks about her life

**Talent section** Part one of new short story by Thomas Simmons

**Plus AUTISM INTERNATIONAL**

Produced by and for people with autism and Asperger syndrome



THE NATIONAL  
AUTISTIC SOCIETY

**Asperger United** is a self-help newsletter run by and for people with Asperger syndrome. Its aim is to put people with the condition in touch with each other and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

**Asperger United** is produced by an editorial group consisting of:

**Editor** John Joyce

**Sub-editor** Martin Coppola

**Assisted by** Pam Yates, The Maudsley Hospital's Home Based Team for Autistic Individuals

**Additional Support from** The National Autistic Society

**Subscriptions**

Annual subscription: £4 (4 issues per year).  
Please make cheques made payable to The National Autistic Society.

**Please send all correspondence to**  
*Asperger United*  
c/o The National Autistic Society  
393 City Road  
London EC1V 1NE

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## Order your copy of *Asperger United*

We have had many enquiries about how to order copies of the newsletter from people who do not already subscribe.

If you know of anyone who may wish to subscribe, please do let them have a copy of the subscription form below. Unfortunately, in order to cover the cost of production and postage & packing, there is a subscription fee.

For those of you who do already subscribe to *Asperger United*, it is time to renew your subscription for the coming year. Please fill in the enclosed form and return this with a cheque for £4, if you live in the UK, or £6 if you live overseas, to *Asperger United* c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NE.

Dear readers,

Welcome to the latest edition of your newsletter.

A big vote of thanks to all contributors to this edition.

I hope you all had a Happy Easter.

You may recall a reference in a recent edition, to the doctorate awarded to Therese Jolliffe. If any other readers have earned educational or other qualifications perhaps they would let us know so they can be adequately congratulated in these pages. This includes getting employment or promotion.

Those who know Dr Pat Howlin will wish to join with me in congratulating her on attaining a professorship at St George's Hospital, Tooting.

For future editions, readers please let the editors have information about your summer and other holidays, particularly if you have unusual experiences.

Thank you

*John Joyce*

Your editor,  
John Joyce

## ASPERGER UNITED



### Subscription form

The newsletter is only suitable for adolescents and adults with autism or Asperger syndrome

☐

I would like to subscribe to *Asperger United*

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Please remember to enclose a cheque or postal order for £4.00 if you live in the UK, or £6.00 if you live overseas, made payable to The National Autistic Society.



# Autism International

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This section deals with letters and correspondence from overseas. Please send all letters and correspondence to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NE, United Kingdom.

## A Letter from Malta

Dear *Asperger United*,

Your Christmas greeting has taken off a burden, because I still have the card you sent from the Pyrenees, but I couldn't be sure of the address. And you know how it is when you are busy; work deferred is work forgotten.

I enclose some information about The Eden Foundation. You will notice that STEP, ACE and UCB (the programmes relating to the PDD range) are only two out of a number of programmes covering a spread of developmental disabilities. The programmes are still quite young; in fact, ACE and UCB were only set up three months ago. We are working quite closely with the NAS in the UK and two of their staff are expected in February for a week's training.

The PDD range of difficulties is only now being recognised in Malta, mainly due to the awareness we have raised during these last five years. Our educational system, based on the British one, is creaking at the seams as well. Our special schools are more respite centres than anything else, and mainstream teachers are almost devoid of any skills pertaining to any form of developmental disability.

We have been fighting for the introduction of Inclusive

Education, which has been accepted in principle. The great debate is not about the nuts and bolts of its introduction. There is a certain amount of opposition from the teaching body, same as in the UK, I believe, where they are threatening strike action if they are given children with behavioural problems. But I am sure that eventually we shall do away with most special schools and educate children with additional needs in regular ones. In the meantime, Eden is teaming up with the University, the Health Department and the Education Division to provide the specialised services that are giving us such good results.

All this may sound a bit pompous coming from such a young organisation. I know full well we have a lot to learn, but we have lived a very intense five years and learnt a lot.

Perhaps you could send us a copy of your magazine. Keep in touch and I look forward to meeting you one day.

With kind regards,  
Godwin Scerri from The Eden Foundation, Malta.

### Reply from the editor

Thank you for your letter Godwin. This is an advance on assistance for people with disabilities in Malta.

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## A letter from Mwenda Jane in Dar-Es-Salaa, Tanzania

Dear *Asperger United*,

Thanks very much for your Xmas card which I met in my office. How do you do? Sorry for not replying immediately, because when I came back I had to prepare for the opening of our new autistic school. I think you remember, I informed you that in Tanzania we didn't have a school or even a centre for autistic children, they were put in ordinary schools. If they were experiencing behavioural problems; the teachers in ordinary schools would chase them away or they would be put in a mentally retarded school. What I did was organise all parents who have autistic children and we

wrote a project proposal so that we could find some donors and build up a school for them. The school was inaugurated on February 21 this year. I will post to you a picture of the school, with children playing.

### Reply from the editor

Thank you for this letter Jane. I will send you a personal reply, but we are glad to note that there are advances in helping children with autism in your country.



## AUTISM INTER-NET!

### Support on The Net

A website providing support for University students with autistic spectrum conditions is up and running on the Internet. It has been designed and built by Clare, who is a University student and has Asperger syndrome herself, in order to provide support, and a resource, on the web for people with autistic spectrum conditions in higher education.

The site, entitled 'University students with autism and Asperger syndrome', has first-person accounts, tips and advice, a reference list of books, an article specifically about University students with higher functioning autism and Asperger syndrome, and an email discussion list.

The site can be visited at:  
<http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~cns/index.html>

#### Reply from the editors

Thank you for letting us know your internet address. For your information I am hoping to establish a support group for people with Asperger syndrome who are at University or due to start University. If you think this could be of benefit to you please write to me, Pam Yates, at The Maudsley Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 8AZ.

If anyone else is aware of the existence of websites containing information on autism and Asperger syndrome please let us know.

## Scanning for images

The production team at *Asperger United* are soon to have access to a computer scanner and we will be able to include images in the next issue. We hope this will improve the newsletter, allow us to show off your drawing talents and, if you send in photos, enable us to put names to faces. So, please send any pictures, photographs and drawings to us at *Asperger United*.

## Seeking your help

**Anne Marie Nelis, who is the Secretary of the STEPS Project in Norfolk, outlines the new project and how you can help.**

As the secretary of a new Asperger syndrome project I am writing to ask readers exactly what sort of help they would like to have - a 'wish list' if you like. I am directing this request to anyone with Asperger syndrome, you need not necessarily live in Norfolk. I found the letter about group homes by David Shamash in the last edition particularly informative. If we are planning services for people with Asperger syndrome, and want these to be successful and useful, it is crucial to know what you want and need rather than us deciding for you. So please write and tell me c/o *AU* what would make your life better?

#### Reply from the editor

Thank you for your letter. I hope you are able to offer the kind of service that meets peoples wishes and needs.

## Nottingham support group for people with Asperger syndrome

Just to keep you up to date there is a group which is up and going in Nottingham for people with Asperger syndrome, of all ages and interests. We usually get a good turn out and as well as planning and carrying out our own activities in and around Nottingham we hope to get together with neighbouring groups such as Rotherham and Leicester. Is there a group out there in Lincoln? It would be interesting for us to hear what is going off in Lincoln too ?! If there is anyone who lives in or around Nottingham, or within reasonable travelling distance, do come and join us. We look forward to keeping readers up to date with our progress!

#### Reply from the editor

Thank you for this information. Perhaps you could send us a contact address for your group. Does anyone know of other support groups? If so, please send us information about them.

## News News News

Please do continue to send in any news that we can include in *Asperger United*. Let us know what you have been doing recently, if any support groups exist in your area and what activities you are involved in, or of future events that are being planned. All news is welcomed and will be of interest to readers of *AU*. Please send in any news items to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NE.



# Letters to the Editor

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Please send all letters to:  
**Asperger United**  
**c/o The National Autistic Society**  
**393 City Road**  
**London EC1V 1NE**  
**Fax 0171 833 9666**

Dear *Asperger United*,

I read with fascination the April 1996 edition of poems by Tim Loder and Selma Star, and the letter by David Miedzianik. I was particularly touched by David's letter about wanting a girlfriend, because I have Asperger syndrome and have difficulty relating to other people of both sexes.

I met my wife-to-be back in 1986, and we married two years later. We struggled for most of our marriage and got divorced in 1995. I moved from the Portsmouth area to Southampton, because I was studying Biochemistry at Southampton University, and lived for two months with an unsympathetic and sometimes cantankerous landlady. This, combined with my divorce and the people I was working with at a cake factory in the Summer, of 1995, made me realise that I was much better off living on my own.

My experiences with people at a pharmaceutical company I worked at before University are numerous enough to write an autobiography! I was repeatedly picked on by several of the supervisors over a period of years, which undermined my health to the extent that I was offered voluntary redundancy, which I accepted gratefully.

I can certainly empathise with the contributors of *Asperger United*, and I wish you all the best of luck for the future.

Best wishes,  
Peter Mills

## Reply from the editor

Thank you for your letters Peter. We all wish you the best of luck as well as hope to hear from you again.

Dear *Asperger United*,

I am writing to enquire about publications and any interest you have in receiving new material to be published. I am a sufferer of Asperger syndrome and have written many reports on myself including one big report on my life as a sufferer of Asperger syndrome, and was wondering if you would be interested in publishing them at all.

I wanted to write about myself and my condition to make others understand what I was going through and the professionals and doctors who have read them so far have found them extremely useful. I am not interested in making any money in any way only in helping others who suffer from the syndrome and their carers in any way I can, as well as the general public, so anything you were interested in publishing would be at no cost at all. I would be perfectly happy for any proceeds to go to The National Autistic Society.

I am hoping to write a book in the future on my life and experiences therefore anything that I had published in the meantime would be of a good experience and background for me in hopefully selling this book in the future.

I will look forward to hearing from you as soon as it is convenient for you to reply.

Joseph Powell

## Reply from the editor

Thank you for your letter. We get a lot of articles from people telling us about their lives and experiences as sufferers of Asperger syndrome. We try to publish these as space allows. Perhaps you would like to put something down and send it to us. Not too long as we may then have to edit it.

# Letters to the Editor

Dear *Asperger United*,

Many thanks for the recent edition of *Asperger United* and thank you for publishing my letter in your previous edition. Practical psychology has long been a pet subject of mine as you may have gathered.

I first got interested when I enrolled for a home study course on the subject and that introduced me to self-hypnosis, but I did not have any brilliant success with this. I am still not sure as to whether or not it works. I went of from the home study course to read Freud and at first I thought he had the answer. You see I had recently been discharged from the RAF as a chronic neurotic and don't know whether I was 'cured'. From my readings of Freud's works I can only say that I very much doubt that there is any such 'cure'. In many ways I seem to be neurotic still, and what is it? Is there any real difference between neurosis and autism?

I really abandoned Freud when I read in his 'Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety', his admission that he never knew what abreaction was and never understood inhibition in work and found nothing in any ways helpful for, you see, inhibition in work has long been my trouble. I do not know if your Dr Asperger had any ideas about it, and do you have any ideas about that (is its name 'ergophobia', can you inform me). I read, or tried to read Peter Hobson's *Autism and the development of mind* but I found no reference to any of these things any more than I found any reference to autism in any of Freud's works. So you see I am at a dead end through at one time I thought I was beginning to get somewhere with Hobson. I got to page 67 in his book hoping to come to something about adult autism but I finally gave it up since Mr Hobson seems to be pre-occupied with infantile autism, autistic children, that is, and little I could relate in any practical sense to myself.

Now I don't really think I know exactly what autism really is. Just how is it treatable? Do you get any 'happy releases', shall we say that would be anything like resembling the abreaction that Freud so openly and frankly admitted to never having understood. What would the equivalent be for an autistic person? I am not hoping for it to happen in my case, there is probably no such thing anyway and like me Freud would have been wasting his time searching for or trying to make it happen. First one would have to determine the 'original cause to associate the so-called 'morbid complex' with to eliminate it and I have met with no such case as this in all my readings.

I would like to know, is this 'inhibition in work that Freud never understood, what is it?' I could not write my own working life's history. I, like Freud, would not have a clue and anyway, at nearly 76, I am not contemplating a try. And I see no reason to try reading Mr Hobson's book again. I am much too old to hope for an 'abreaction' or 'cure' now. Can you suggest anything?

John A. Brookes

## Reply from the editor

Thank you for your letter. I am glad to hear from an older John with the same complaint. Autism, as you know, is not treatable in the medical manner with drugs, but you seem to have done well without any input or treatment so perhaps you could help others with your experiences of coping with Asperger syndrome.

Dear *Asperger United*,

Hello my name is Jed Fishmick and I am writing this letter to help some/all of you. I want you to know about a radio station called UCB that has started. It is a Christian radio station and is bringing hope, help, love, meaning to life, comfort to many people as God is at work through the people of UCB. You don't have to be a Christian to listen to UCB, it is for everyone.

There are two stands - one stand is particularly aimed at young people. This is called UCB-cross rhythms, on from about 11.30 pm until 2 am. The other stand is UCB-Europe, on from about 4.30 pm until 11.30 pm.

I listen to both stands. You can hear UCB on 1386 KHz medium wave 7 days a week (reception seems to be better later on than earlier). You can also get UCB on satellite radio 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. This is on Astra satellite, Sky sports, audio channel 7.56 MHz if you happen to have satellite radio. Do you know that God wants to be our friend who looks after us in every way?

## Reply from the editor

Thank you Jed for this letter. Be assured I will try to listen to this radio station.

# Letters to the Editor

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Dear *Asperger United*,

Time to pop my head round the door so to speak. Last year I had some months on Incapacity Benefit but have had to go back to the stresses of Job Seekers agreement which pressurises you to apply for jobs in the area in which you live at the moment. I am still hopeful of getting settled back South this year. I have a microvan for the journey but there's no way I can try again the idea of driving round trying to find something vaguely adequate. Having stayed with Christian worker friends in Somerset regularly since 1971, helping in various ways and exploring Wessex as well, a year in Taunton, 88-89, mainly self-catering sharing a house in Taunton was very lovely experience.

But my interest in train spotting and travel developed and with the model-making as well, have continued to develop even further. My latest completion is a storage box, 16" x 8" x 12", a facsimile of Wealden Hall timber framed building, all the screw heads and joints covered with PCA wood glue and wood dust mixes and painted green for a shrub effect (and also to hide architecturally awkward bits!)

I would love to use my knowledge of London and the south country geography, geology, history and rail routes to take small groups of foreign tourists or language students to places of interest. During my three trips to German-speaking Europe in 1982-83 I battled with foreign language problems when the folks I was with had little, or no, English.

I find it a battle to keep going 'oop ere in Eurksha' (up here in Yorkshire!). I am a southerner by regional personality and feel that a large part of me is imprisoned. I need to sit down at mealtimes and talk about the interests shared with new friends rather than always be in the shadow of my parents and sister and all their Christian activities.

My Asperger diagnosis correlates with the church-based inner healing, that is coming to terms with the failure to become what my parents had promised God they would bring me up to become - something special for God. So now its only coffee after the service that keeps me going to church at all and no other regular friendships or social activities.

Robin C B Wraight.

## Reply from the editor

Thanks for your letter. Perhaps you could send us a picture of your completed storage box. Do you sell them? If so, would you like to advertise in *Asperger United*?

Dear *Asperger United*,

Having received my first copies of *Asperger United*, I thought you might be interested in a speech that I made at a conference in Paisley (near Glasgow,) last December, that was attended by approximately 200 people.

I have been overwhelmed by the reception my speech received, both by those present at the conference, and those who have heard about it and read it since. I will also have spoken to teachers and parents who work with/have autistic children at a school in Johnstone (near Paisley), which I am doing at the end of March.

The assistant head teacher at the school attended the conference in Paisley and has also been contributing to the recently formed Inverclyde Support Group, which my Mum and I also attend. The group is organised via The National Autistic Society's Glasgow office and meets on the second Tuesday of each month in Greenock.

Through talking about my own experiences, I hope, in whatever way I can to further the knowledge and understanding of Asperger syndrome.

The supported work placement I was doing when I made my speech has just ended. Two people from the office typed my speech for me (but any errors are due to my proof reading skills which aren't as good as they should be!).

I have just started some voluntary work at The National Autistic Society's Glasgow office, which I am really enjoying. I am very interested in corresponding with anyone who may wish to write to me.

Best wishes,  
William Rice

## Reply from the editor

Thank you for your letter and speech which we would like to publish in the next issue. Well done on the excellent delivery of a fine speech.



## In Reply....

Here we will print replies to letters and articles that have appeared in recent editions of *Asperger United*. This section is your chance to respond to, and air your views on, issues that have been raised.

### In reply to Isobel Brookfield (Edition 14, November 1998)

Dear Isobel Brookfield,

In reply to your letter to *Asperger United*. I honestly cannot say I had a good experience at mainstream school because I was teased so much (and I never got, and still don't get on with girls). I lacked the non-verbal communication skills - picking up non-verbal 'innuendoes' and transmitting, for example, voice intonation, body language, eye contact - thus leading to take everything literally. I had the same problem when I was at agricultural college. What did show up was supersensitivity. However, a long time later now I have many friends (former enemies!) whom I see, I believe because a few of them got to know me really well, then started to like me after college, many having said at reunifications how confident I had become. I do not think I would have benefited from 'Special Education' (sounds too politically correct!) as I would have not learnt to relate to 'normal' people but, unfortunately, whilst at school and college Asperger and its problems was not recognised.

I am only now in a social skills group (The Mary Lynch Group) and I my recommendation is that you send Paul to a mainstream which is 'autism friendly', especially one which does extra-curricular social skills training. If the school does not provide this training then you may have to seek help from, say, The National Autistic Society. One thing I still can't get on with is girls and I wish there was a direct answer to that but I know that is impossible where fate counts!!!

Best wishes,  
Tim Loder

### In reply to Samantha Hope (Edition 15, January 1998)

I have Asperger syndrome and once lived at Elmsmead in Taunton where I knew Samantha Hope (who wrote in the last edition). I found Sam a very nice and interesting person. I now live by the sea in Kent. My interests are old cars, buses and trains (although I don't know much about trains). Although I cannot drive I own two old cars, a 1968 Mini and a Ford Cortina 1600E. The Cortina belonged to my late Uncle (I am sure you Sam remember it!). Once a week Simon, my key worker, drives me to college in one of my old cars which I look forward to all week.

I hope you remain happy at Elmsmead Sam.

Yours sincerely,  
Tim Beaumont

### In reply to the Survey report on sexual behaviour (Edition 14, November 1998)

I am writing with my comments on the sex survey article in edition 14 of *Asperger United*.

- › I am as sexual as anyone else.
- › I do not express myself sexually in an inappropriate way.
- › There is no such thing as the norm.
- › I have no behavioural problems.
- › This is true; I cannot maintain a relationship.

Comment: I am not strictly a masculine macho man which makes things uncomfortable for myself and those near me, since society expects me to be all man while I am actually rather a gentle person.

Yours sincerely,  
George



# Pen Pals

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- › If you would like to reply to any of the letters or requests for contacts then please send your letter to: *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NE.
- › Please do remember to let us know the full name (please remember to include the surname) of the person who your letter is for.
- › We will pass your letters on to the appropriate person. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.
- › We hold a list of people in the United Kingdom, other parts of Europe and the world, who would like a pen pal. If you are interested in having a pen pal please write in and let us know.

## Marcus Lunn, Reading

My name is Marcus Lunn and I am twenty years old. My interests are art, music and keeping fit. I hate writing so I am looking for a friend that I can meet who lives near Reading or Henley.

## James Lally, Solihull, West Midlands

My name is James Lally. I am 26 years of age and living at home with my parents. I suffer from Asperger syndrome. I am single but looking for a girlfriend and another friend to go out with. If you're interested please write back to me.

## Michael Wyles, Reading

My name is Michael Wyles and I am 26 years of age. My interests are music, puzzles and watching soaps. I also have my own flat in Reading and a job.

## David Miedzianik (say 'Med-Gen-Nick'), Rotherham

I am 41 years old and I'm autistic. Since my mum died about 5 years ago I've lived by myself and I don't like this. I would now like to meet a woman, to share my life with. Or if not that then someone to meet from time to time, to take away some of the depression I feel from living by myself. The autism makes it very, very hard for me to meet someone.

I don't have a job as such, but my poems are on the Internet. People can access these by typing my surname into the search engine Yahoo on their computer. Details of where to get my poetry books are on the Internet also. My autobiography costs £7 from The Early Years Diagnostic Centre, 272 Longdale Lane, Ravenshead, Nottinghamshire, NG15 9AH. The £7 covers P&P, so that's all people have to send. My poetry book *Taking the load of my mind* costs £7 from the same address and my other poetry book *Now all I've got left is myself* costs £8 from the same address too. All prices include P&P. So the prices stated are exactly what people have to send.

Another thing is I have 2 songs about myself on the Autism Awareness album *A season of changes*. One of these songs is called *Song for David* by Ray Hearne, and the other song is called *A lass to want me* by Jez Lowe and The Bad Pennies. More details about this album are on the Internet under my name search. Also people can phone up Howard Rowe on 01302 761315 for more details about the Autism Awareness album. If you don't have your own computer, a lot of libraries have them now and they'll let you use them to do a name search. They might even show you how to do this. Anyway as for now, I wish that Jez Lowe's song was true and a lass would want me as I feel very low at present. By the way I have a lovely 3 bedroom semi-detached house, in the suburbs of Rotherham. So I think the right person could be very happy here.

Once again, I hope that someone nice will contact me as I feel low right now. Autism is a very depressing condition. The isolation caused by it makes it very hard for me.



## Judge not and ye shall not be judged by Nicola Wills

Judge not and ye shall not be judged ...thus quoteth The Bible. And how very true the saying is. We, as a society are notorious for taking people at face value and making assumptions about their personality, judging their appearance and the manner in which they behave. However, this does not determine the person that they really are. Yet, given a choice, people would prefer to talk to and get to know the person who appears smartly dressed, with a confident manner, than the one who is a little different in manner seeming to be withdrawn and with not much to say. Why? It is because as a race personal appearance and demeanour is of paramount importance and helps one to imagine what that person would be like as a friend or someone to talk to. Yet there is more to one than meets the eye and it does not always follow that the prettiest girl is the nicest, or most intelligent person, to get to know. Appearances can be deceptive and sadly many people are misjudged. People suffering from autism are certainly no exception, indeed the very word 'autism' conjures up many negative images in people's minds. To them autism means 'thick', 'in a world of your own' and incapable of really achieving anything positive in life. Autism has a social stigma to it and normally a person labelled as 'autistic' others will often be shyed away from and assumed to be stupid and not worth knowing. Not only does the autistic person face problems among ordinary people but also many employers are prejudiced against autism. Employers are reluctant to employ anyone with the condition because they believe autistics are not capable of doing their jobs properly.

I am a sufferer of autism. However, I was not diagnosed until last year, at the age of twenty-one, with Asperger

syndrome, I have faced numerous difficulties in my life of some form or another with people due to the way I am. I feel that people have always looked at the person on the outside who appears unfashionable, and shy, and who does not really know how to approach people correctly. People judge me without really getting to know the person on the inside first. During my adolescent years, in particular, I had very bad experiences with people who looked upon me as a 'weirdo', 'retard', 'shy' and in a 'world of my own'. At one of my secondary schools even the teachers were against me because I found it difficult to concentrate in subjects I did not like such as Maths and Science. Teachers were not very keen to have me in their GCSE classes.

Even as an adult I still have problems in forming friendships with others and people do not always know how to react to me. Throughout my life my attempts at making friends with certain people I have liked have always backfired as, out of desperation, I have gone about it the wrong way; by following, staring and trying to attract their attention in silly, inappropriate ways which I now realise were wrong and upsetting to them. My latest attempt at College has inevitably ended in tears and rejection and once again I am the object of ridicule by many people there who have misread my motives and assumed the worst. I now have no-one and, as a result, am forced to spend lunch times in isolation from everyone else.

However, I gained GCSE's and A'Levels and am now studying for a degree in graphic design. I also have many interests including reading, languages, drawing and painting and listening to a wide variety of music including Classical and Jazz. By any

standards I am far from 'thick' and am quite an intelligent person. Yet because of what I am on the outside people are not always willing to approach me and therefore never see the positive aspects to my nature.

At present, no-one apart from tutors on my course at college know I have Asperger syndrome and I do not really feel I can tell people what exactly is wrong with me and why I sometimes do the things I do. I know the implications that autism has in society and am afraid of how people will react to me if they knew the truth and worry that they will not understand. I feel I have to be false, put on an act and pretend everything in my life is 'hunky-dory'. I often feel ashamed of the fact that I have autism and conceal the 'real me', who I am, by fitting in and trying to be 'normal' to please everyone else and gain acceptance.

But I am also guilty of judging others on first appearance, particularly fellow sufferers. I attended the October 1997 conference at The Maudsley Hospital and it was my first chance to meet a group of Asperger people who experience the same difficulties as me in life. However, I encountered many whose habits seemed to me to be offensive, off-putting and annoying and I spent most of the time there trying to avoid speaking or coming into contact with them. It was a good and valuable experience for me as through observing how the condition affected others and the ways in which they behaved I was starting to see my own behaviour from other people's point of view and why it must be difficult for them to sometimes relate to me. Yet, above all, I of all people had no right to criticise and dismiss these human beings and should have been far more sympathetic on account of my own problems!!!

## About My Life

by Theresa Dann

My name is Theresa and I am 18 years old. I live in a flat, called The Independent Unit, for those who are learning to live independently. I live in with three other people called Chris, Andrew and Julie, and although they don't have Asperger syndrome, they do have problems. I get on quite well with them most of the time. There is another person who has Asperger syndrome called Ruth, who is 21, and she lives in the big house next to my flat (my flat is part of Florence Villa). I get on quite well with her and we are good friends although the problems she has are different to mine. I don't know how bad her syndrome is, I think I would say mine is fairly mild.

My flat is in a place called Florence Villa, in Stoke-on-Trent. I have been at Florence Villa since 29 June last year and I moved into the flat in November. I hope to be living on my own by next summer 1999. The last place I lived in was in Devon, called Sedgemoor College, which was for girls who had problems. Even though I liked it at Sedgemoor I always felt unhappy and left out, as none of the girls seemed to accept me or my problems which were very different to theirs. I had very few friends at Sedgemoor because of my problems. After being there a couple of years I attended mainstream college in Tiverton. I didn't really make many friends there either because of the problems I had. I was laughed at, teased and picked on, and often spent breaks on my own because I didn't have any proper friends. The course I did - 'Independent Living' - had people who were in their late twenties and thirties, leading up to their forties, and the problems they had were often more serious than mine so I never really made any friends. I was with

the wrong people, though they were nice people, and I liked the course I did but I think I would have made more friends if I had been with people nearer to my own age.

At Florence Villa they have their own college set up, which is all about learning to be independent. Also, I have two work experience placements. The first is working at a shop called *Jasmines*, part of which is a florist and the other part a shop that sells food. I work in both parts and might be getting a Saturday job there soon. The second placement I do is at a factory called *Bio-glass 2000* where they make tubes for fish tanks.

Most of my family have Asperger syndrome. My mum has it and so does Laura, Rachel (7), Chris (5) and Nick (20). I don't know how bad theirs are. The only ones who don't have it are Amanda who is 15 and Sean, 4. Although I don't get on very well with my Mum, because we both have the same syndrome, I think that sometimes we don't understand each other very well and she gets on my nerves sometimes. I sometimes wish I didn't have her as my mother. I do love her of course but sometimes I feel she can't give me the things I want, or need, most probably because of her Asperger syndrome. None of us live with her, we all live in different places as she struggled in looking after us.

Someday though, I would very much like a baby of my own. I think that with a decent father, and people to help, I would be able to handle a baby. People say to me, because of my syndrome, that I wouldn't be able to cope with one, but I just ignore that. I know that I will be able to cope with a

baby of my own, with some support. One thing with me is I'll never give up on things. I'll always keep fighting for what I want until I get it and will always be determined to prove people wrong. I never let people stand in the way of what I want to do. If they want to think I'll never be able to do something because of my syndrome then let them think that is all I say. At the end of the day I'll always prove them wrong.

During weekday evenings I do athletics, skiing (I recently went to Scotland and won a silver medal in a skiing competition) and Tai Kwon Do self defence. I also hope to join the gym and do boxing soon as well.



# Talent Spotting - A Short Story

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**Here we begin Part one of a short story by Thomas Simmons. Unfortunately, Thomas did not give his story a name. However, we will be serialising the story over the next three issues. So, enjoy Part one...**

As they walked along the cold stone floor, their footsteps echoed ominously down the tunnel. The flickering light from their lanterns only illuminated a few metres ahead, and the darkness seemed to be closing in on them. They walked slowly and quietly, to avoid traps, and listen for enemies lurking in the shadows.

There were three of them. In front were two warriors wearing heavy armour and wielding broadswords. The third was an old wizard, dressed in a dark blue robe, holding a large book in one hand, and a strange staff in the other. He looked about sixty, yet he had lived for over two hundred years.

The tunnel seemed to go on forever. Looking back, they could just see the cave entrance, now just a tiny point of light. The walls were covered in moss, and the floor was wet and slimy. Occasionally the tunnel would turn slightly, but it still went in the same general direction. Straight into the heart of the mountain.

"Wait," said the old wizard, "I feel a strong magical force ahead".

The warriors stopped, expectantly. They had been with the wizard long enough to know that he was usually right about such matters. They didn't know much about magic, anyway.

The wizard stepped forward, into the lantern-light. In the light, he looked much more impressive. His blue robe was covered with tiny silver runes. The book he held seemed to be full of strange letters and symbols, and it had a row of emeralds along the thick spine. But most spectacular of all was his staff...

It was nearly as tall as the wizard himself, made from wood so dark it was almost black. A carved snake coiled itself around the staff, surrounded by runes. The snake's head was at the top, and it's large mouth held a fiery red gemstone that seemed to pulsate with mystical energy.

He mumbled something, and the gemstone on the staff seemed to explode into a huge fireball. The warriors jumped back in surprise. Ironfist, the older and stronger of the two, tripped over something, and almost fell over. The light from the wizard's staff grew brighter, and the obstacle was revealed.

It was a skeleton, which looked human, apart from a set of pointed teeth. The light reflected off a small shiny object clutched in a skeletal hand. Hyron, the second warrior, reached down to get the object, but Ironfist stopped him.

"I don't like the look of it," Ironfist explained, "It might be cursed." He looked over at the wizard, and was just about to ask a question, when he heard a noise. A sort of scraping sound. He spun around, just in time to see the skeleton slowly, shakily stand up.

Hyron had seen, too. With an evil grin, he swung his sword in a wide arc, hitting the skeleton with such force that it split in two, collapsing on the floor. A few seconds later, it began to crumble and decay, until all that remained was a pile of dust.

Xargoth, the wizard, frowned and stepped forward. His expression froze, and slowly changed to that of horror as he saw what was lying half-covered in the pile of dust.

Before Xargoth could stop them, the warriors had leaned over to look. It was a small gold disc, with a large rune in the centre.

The Death Rune...

...Their fate was sealed.

*continued in the next issue...*



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