

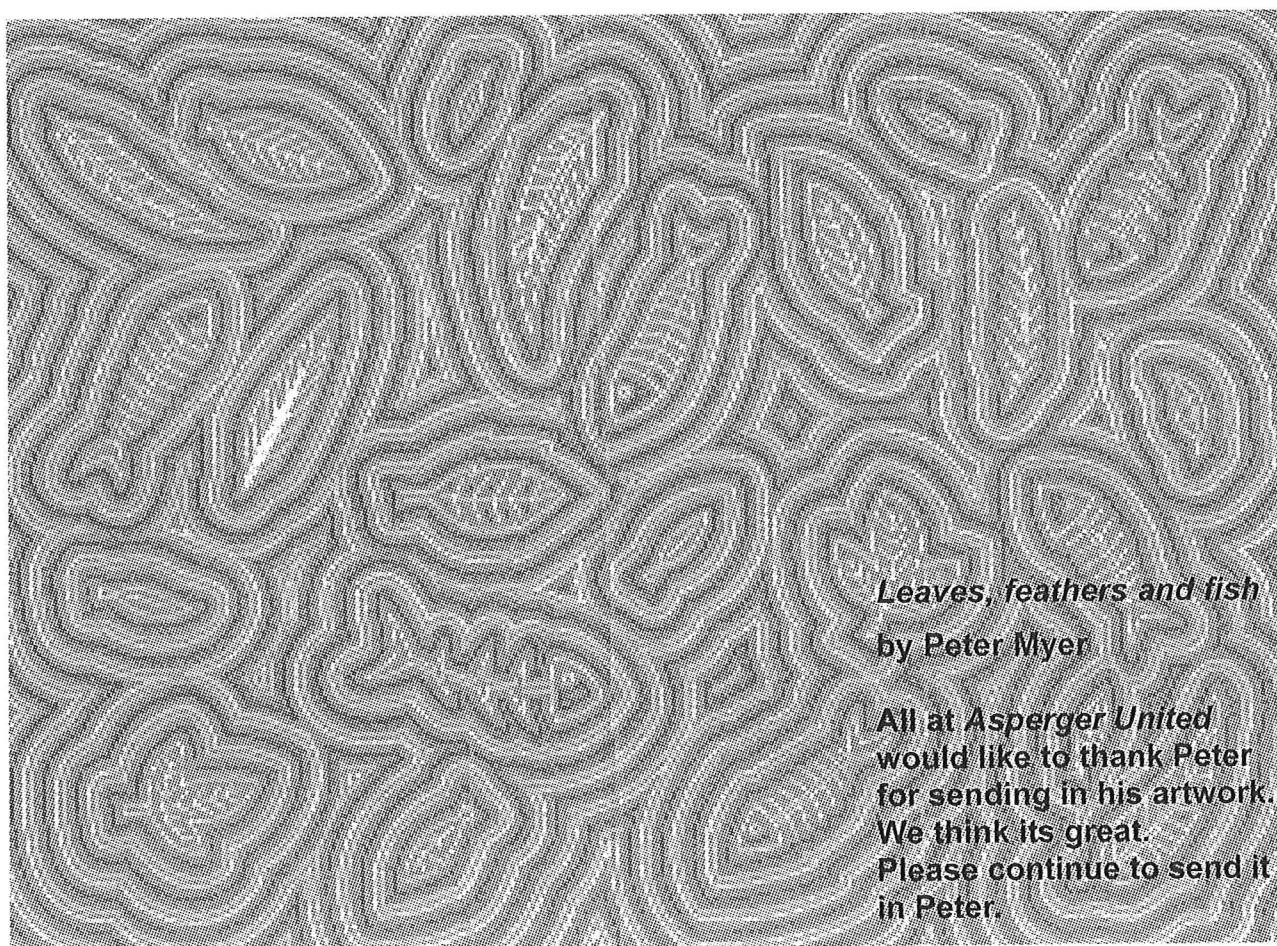
Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

# *united* Asperger

Edition 21 Autumn 1999

## Focus on experiences at school

includes a short story by Vanessa Dickinson



*Leaves, feathers and fish*  
by Peter Myer

All at Asperger *United*  
would like to thank Peter  
for sending in his artwork.  
We think its great.  
Please continue to send it  
in Peter.







*Asperger United* is a self-help newsletter run by and for people with Asperger syndrome. The newsletter aims 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:

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Thank you to George Cox who kindly produced the illustrations included in the Pen Pal Network section.

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*Please note that the views expressed in Asperger United are not necessarily those of the Editors, The National Autistic Society or those involved the publication of the newsletter.*

## Extra news from your editor

I was born in Glasgow during October 1944 and came to London at the age of six months and therefore fail to speak with a Scottish accent! I am the eldest of six children, the second of whom is already deceased.

After 27 years of Government service I was given my worst performance report by my line management. In September 1992 – the same time as the above occurred – my sister Catherine heard a radio programme about Asperger syndrome and thought I displayed some of the traits.

I was then diagnosed by Pam Yates and Patricia Howlin (who are both based in London). Since then I have continued to work for the Home Office. I had previously heard of a condition called 'autism' but Asperger syndrome – my disability – was news to me.

Having been diagnosed, I joined a social skills group, originally at The Maudsley Hospital but now at The National Autistic Society, which I still attend.

I have followed further education courses, including an Open University course whose exams I have just taken.

Five years from now I am likely to be thinking of retirement. What is this? At a certain age men and women who are employed decide that they wish to give this up and live the proverbial 'life of leisure'. However, some philosophers, who have retired, wonder how they found the time to go to work. I would like to be in this second club, but only because I like travel and languages.

It is my hope to continue my church work, gain an Open University degree and continue to edit *Asperger United*. I will also have to learn to care for my needs - washing and repairing clothes. There is also the possibility of having to care for my parents, with whom I live, in their later years which will coincide with my retirement. *John Joyce*

## Dear Friends,

I hope you have all had a good summer.

I enjoyed my summer trip to France and am about to take two exams in my Open University course, one a re-sit.

All of you who participated in the conference on Asperger syndrome held at Regent's College on the 7th October please send in your impressions of the conference for the next edition of the *Asperger United*.

May I, as usual, thank all who have contributed to this edition and hope readers who have not will consider doing so for future editions. A special thank you to all poets who have contributed poems to this, and past, editions, of *Asperger United*. It would be good to produce an 'Asperger anthology' of poems and, who knows, the next Poet Laureate might be Asperger!

Many of you have contributed articles on your school days, particularly experiences of being bullied. It is to be hoped that such behaviour will not be repeated in future and that 'normal' schools will be able to recognise the differences in their pupils. Maybe also both the Government departments for education and employment can be approached for their assistance.

Your editor,

*John Joyce*

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In the last edition of *Asperger United* we requested that readers send in articles about their experiences at school. Thank you to all who sent in such articles. The articles printed here underline the need for recognition and support. During my school days nobody knew about Asperger syndrome but I hope schools will be able to identify the disability and offer support in the future. *John Joyce*

# The best days of my life? I hope not!!

School was dreadful. I was rarely actually bullied but I became increasingly aware that I was always alone and different from the others. I couldn't work in groups because I could not follow the quick, often loud, verbal exchange and constant change of speaker. I would hide in the toilets having what I now know to be panic attacks. At home my parents and brother and sister teased me for having no friends. I am still surprised my teachers never seemed to notice anything was wrong. I suppose the quality of my written work hid to a large degree my inabilities in the social sphere. In the last two years at school I stopped handing my homework in because even this would have been too much exposure of self. I was told by my teachers that I could not learn while looking out of the window in class - in fact this was the only way I COULD learn. The movement and noise in the classroom was more stimulation than I could consistently cope with but I could efficiently process information gathered peripherally while appearing to be daydreaming. I still have nightmares (at the age of 25) about being unable to find my school timetable and not knowing when important exams would be. I filled my dinner times by

joining choir orchestra, Christian as a high achiever - I have 2 A grades, 5 B's, a C and a D at GCSE- but I could have done so much better with recognition of my difficulties and appropriate support.

I left sixth-form college after two weeks as I couldn't cope with the lack of structure, long bus journey and compulsory "holiday" week the all first year students had to go on, to practice teamwork skills.

Recently I wrote a letter to my school headmistress telling of my difficulties and asking that she offer support to any students with similar problems, but I did not have the nerve to post it.

I now live on my own without too much outside interference, on disability benefits. I am afraid to consider getting a job in case I am ostracised as I was at school. I value my independence above all else, but I am very angry that no one cared enough to help me as a child.

I can only hope that my ex-school's adaptations to meet the needs of people with physical disabilities will extend to offering support for those with social/communication/emotional disabilities.

*Joanna Lavender*

## School trauma

I can't remember much about my experiences at school, perhaps because I went to a normal school and my condition was undiagnosed. This meant that I didn't really fit in at all, although I was intelligent enough to do the work. It seems to have been like the German lesson I remember in which we were studying Brecht's 'Der Gute Mensch.' What became clear was that 'der gute mensch' was autistic and so was I, although at the time I refused to admit it and couldn't accept it either. Everybody else knew and despised me for it. It was one long trauma, my time there. *George Pain*

## Apology

All at *Asperger United* would like to apologise to Joanna Lavender for the mistake in her article 'The fight for acceptance and the right to be unacceptable' which was printed in the last edition of this newsletter. The third paragraph of the article should have read: 'My scars are like a partly decipherable language in which I feel safe to speak. I am forbidden by the society in which I live to speak the language of autism...'. Sorry Joanna.



# Bullied at school

I was bullied at school because I was autistic. After not having many problems at a previous school, which was much smaller, I moved to a large public school. Because I didn't understand jokes, was 'hyper' sensitive and because I had Asperger syndrome (high functioning autism) which was then not recognised and was called names like 'spastic' (as if I had cerebral palsy!). These were hurtful remarks. Maybe I over read into people's insults and facial expressions. I never and still don't get on with women. I was not too shy to ask a girl to dance at discos but was always met by a rejection or rebuff.

My fellow peers would flick elastic bands at me to see what my reaction would be (as I didn't know how to react) and they chucked my satchel, bags and books about which really upset me. As well as bullying me generally people would say horrible things to me such as 'freak', because I was hopeless at sports as well as being 'thick' academically (I only got a small amount of what was then O'Levels, CSEs).

I left school at 17, in December 1975, and am now 41. I went into agriculture because it was traditional in my family to put people into farming who didn't have much 'brains' but can do practical things – as compared to my brilliant mathematician

cousin.

By the way, I had the same sort of problems when I went to agricultural college including being thrown in the bath and river and having food chucked at me during mealtimes too, as at school.

Now I have managed to make friends with them. In fact, one of them who is now my friend said 'it is only your reaction'. The physician Newton discovered that to every reaction there is an equal and opposite reaction, as my friend also remarked that if only I could laugh along with it people won't see me getting upset and so won't attempt to upset me. Towards the end of my stay at the agricultural college this person teased and bullied me the worst - we're best of friends now.

I am now a freelance gardener – a trade – and my feelings are that I'll show them I am not 'thick' or a 'spastic'.

*Tim Loder*

## Note from the editor

Thank you for this article. We hope understanding of Asperger syndrome will be shown by both teachers and pupils in 'normal' schools and that abuse and bullying will end.

# Schools

My school days were certainly not the happiest days of my life. The other children picked on me and the teachers used to hit us.

I am not sure that it would have helped to know that I have Asperger syndrome. I might have gone to a Special School or to no school at all. Although that might have been better than being miserable at School, I would not have been used to studying so I might not have got my O' and A'levels at college.

In those days schools were not keen on accommodating disabled children. When I was about 12, about 30 years ago, a headmaster of an independent school who was good on the whole but was a man of his time, told my mother when she complained about my being slippered for apparently no reason, that he would not have accepted me if he had known more

about me. It would be better to be at school now whether you are disabled or not, because physical abuse of children is nowadays a criminal offence and corporal punishment has just been completely abolished even in private schools.

The Disability Discrimination Act does NOT apply to education and so schools cannot be forced to teach disabled children. If the school knows a child has Asperger syndrome and the child needs too much attention or is a nuisance in any way, a school might take the line that there is no point punishing the child or reasoning with the child, so the school might just ask him or her to leave the school. If a school does not know that a child has Asperger syndrome they might continue struggling with the child and he might grow up well educated, fitting into society. The teachers found it difficult to

teach me subjects like geometry and art. I think that was because of a perception problem rather than Asperger syndrome. I have read The National Autistic Society's (NAS) annual review and wonder if diagnosed children really receive a great deal of useful support or whether having a label just stigmatises them more.

I think there is too much emphasis at the meetings of the NAS on early diagnosis and on children with Asperger syndrome as schools need to continue to improve for all children. I think if I had a chance to visit a school today I would not recognise it. *David Shamash*

## Note from the editor

Thank you for your article. I hope it enlightens those of our readers who may be experiencing difficulties.





# Can any readers help?

Dear *Asperger United*,

I am looking for help and wonder if any of your other readers can help. I am 18 years old and was diagnosed as having Asperger syndrome in 1997. With the help of understanding people I have been able to use the positive elements of this condition in a creative way. Since leaving college in the Summer I have been able to start a business venture which has enabled me to make contact with people from all walks of life and develop my communication skills. Passing my driving test has enabled me more independence to travel further afield. I am starting a BA Business Studies course at London Guildhall University in the Autumn. I am sure that both the course and extra curricular contact will enable me to gain ideas and openings for business opportunities. I can often be quite obsessive about business matters, but I can control it and use it to my advantage.

The area that is causing me concern, however, is that running alongside all of these positive and creative thoughts in my head is a constant jumble of obsessive nonsense. Try as I may, I cannot seem to clear these thoughts from my head, it becomes a ritualistic repetition. It never goes away but is worse when I am less involved in positive activity. I have been referred to various professional specialists by my GP and a number of tactics have been tried including specific mind exercises, but all to no avail. I am hoping somebody out there has a suggestion for me.

*Matthew Greenwood*

## *Note from the editor*

Matthew, I hope that one of our readers can provide a solution to your difficulty. If any readers can help Matthew, please do write in to *Asperger United* and we will pass on any letters to him.

# More males than females with Asperger syndrome!

Dear *Asperger United*,

It doesn't take me to tell readers that there are more male sufferers of Asperger syndrome than female. So, I believe that is one of the many reasons why a person with the syndrome finds it difficult to get a partner, and finds it frustrating and depressing when one finds that one who is born with Aspergers is one who is born to be made single all his life. This isn't always the case.

I admire the 'Asperger's that were never diagnosed' from the television like Roy Cropper from *Coronation Street* and Reg Hollos from the *Bill*. Maybe Granada TV could come up with a storyline that saw Reg being diagnosed as having Asperger syndrome. After all, they have dealt with the subject of Hayley being a transsexual with some effect. One has to hand it to Hayley, whether she was born female or otherwise.

Which brings me onto another thing, why not set up a Lonely Hearts column for people with Asperger syndrome (like myself). Putting an ad in my local paper proved unsuccessful, because of not only the lack of replies, but also I never seem to like the same things as people my own age. I think that its an excellent idea; I'd like fellow readers to let me know what they think of the

subject.

I'd also like to share with your readers the bizarre coincidence I had, earlier this year. It was March 16th, the anniversary of my father's death. As a tribute, I decided to have a day out on a National Express bus as it was such a lovely day. I went to Coventry ( I wasn't sent there, if you ask!). Whilst I was there, I purchased a copy of the *Birmingham Post* for that date, I got the shock of my life. For on page 5 was an article on Asperger syndrome! The article was about a Dr Tony Attwood. I wonder if any readers have come across him? I wrote to the paper expressing me joy on the subject. Is that fluke or what?

*George Hendley*

## *Note from the editor*

Thank you for your letter. If, as has happened, correspondence over the Internet has created a marriage why should you not achieve the same through these pages.

I wasn't aware of autism among television characters, but, on reflection one can see that as autism is a part of society it can also be so in fiction.





# Asperger syndrome is not about 'suffering'

Dear *Asperger United*,

Hello, my name is Andrew. I am 51 years old. Some of you may have heard my poetry on Talk Radio where I was the resident 'Mad' poet for the first six months of the year. I have started to subscribe to *Asperger United* because I wanted to find out more about the effect of Asperger's on other people's lives - other sufferers and other carers.

The stories and accounts in the latest issue, No. 20, confirm all the difficulties I too have experienced in obtaining a proper diagnosis, a story which in my case is ongoing. I was interested to read the differences in experiences between men and women sufferers of Asperger's.

A letter in issue No 17 caught my eye. 'Proud to be different' was the caption that the editor used for the letter. And this is the theme I wish to develop in this letter.

Following on from the letter in the latest issue (No 20 'We have much to offer'), and now that I have read and shared other Asperger sufferers accounts, the first point I wish to make is that having Asperger's is not a 'suffering'. Other people around Asperger's suffer. My life has been one of wonder and joy while I enjoy my talents.

Because it is my contention that Asperger's are blessed with unique and quite startling qualities and skills which a suspicious society wishes to label as autistic or a 'sufferer'.

Sure, the difficulties of being different, and I mean radically 'different', by having Asperger's in an ever increasingly bland society, should not be underestimated. There have been times when I would have given my right arm to be like other people. But I have arrived at that time in my life when I appreciate differences more and more.

In Issue 19, there is a list written by a woman of the way Asperger's affects her, and it makes interesting reading. Looking down the list, apart from the difficulties ('suffering') put upon her by the people around her, the following could be called exceptional qualities:

- Good vocabulary
- Lateral thinker
- Speaks her mind
- Detailed memory

- Excellent reading skills
- Single minded
- Very good at doing certain tasks

If I could add my own 'special' skills, they would include, in addition to the above:

- Random thinker
- Extraordinary imagination
- Excellent idea of music
- Psychic or insight abilities
- Ability to identify with children
- An innate knowledge of the Ways of the World
- An innate knowledge of the Secrets of Life
- Great problem solving ability
- An overriding desire to make the world a better place
- A healthy tolerance of the mundane

I could go on. I am sure that each person who has Asperger's could compile their own list. Yes, there are negatives, and compared to others, they represent considerable hurdles of understanding. Which is probably one of the reasons why Aspergers are given such a rough ride by society, especially by the medical profession.

In this country, we have only had a sympathetic Health Service to mental illness for the last dozen or so years. Within my life-time, Asperger's would have been locked away in a secure unit forever, given ECT, or extended and expensive courses of drugs, in some vain effort to make them 'normal'.

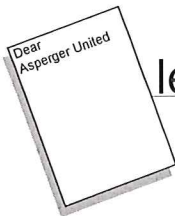
But Asperger's are not normal, and never will be. Asperger's are super-sensitive human beings, who are blessed with an 'alternate hard-wiring system' for their brains (see explanation on next page). The negatives so often associated with Asperger's are only negatives in relation to other people. It is not a negative experience to be an Asperger.

In times gone by, Asperger's would probably have been burnt

“ Because it is my contention that Aspergers are blessed with unique and quite startling qualities and skills which a suspicious society wishes to label as autistic or a 'sufferer' ”

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at the stake, ducked and drowned in the duck pond, or incarcerated forever. There is an element of this suspicion still lurking in the minds of some health professionals. Mentally ill means ill balanced means unpredictable, means dangerous, means Help!

But the columns of *Asperger United*, and similar organs in other countries, are probably the first time ever that Aspergers have had a common voice, and a very powerful common voice I believe it to be.

What I envisage is a true *Asperger United* Think Tank, pooling the resources of those exceptional individuals who have Asperger's and committing our unique abilities for the betterment of the world.

I personally experience great irritation at the incompetence and outright stupidity of our so-called leaders in making decisions or otherwise about those issues that affect all our lives. But as a lone voice, often labelled mad, I feel completely powerless. However, in our increasingly complex world, the need for sanity (oh how I love writing that word!) in the face of ever-increasing obvious madness amongst the populace is becoming paramount, and I believe the Asperger's of the world hold the key.

All it needs is someone with a computer to set up an Asperger website with the sole intention of being a collective pool of our special talents, and we're in business! (I wish!). Of course, it takes more than that, but the difficulties each Asperger has had to overcome just to survive their lives has made them into remarkably strong, and now with knowledge, powerful, individuals.

And it is high time for Asperger's to come out. There must be many Asperger's in quite important positions in society – judges, civil servants, scientists, artists, who have probably never been diagnosed. In many cases, diagnosis may now be impossible, but the common characteristics of Asperger's are now becoming well enough known that those with Asperger's can seek solace and security in the growing number of Asperger's in the world.

We should thank the world for its patient research (we always knew!) into our condition, because it has given us an identity. But the time has come to celebrate the fact that we are different. And how!

## 'Alternate hard wiring systems'

To explain in a little more detail what I mean by 'alternate hard wiring'. For whatever reason, I grew up seeing the world as the way I saw it. I formed my own opinions based on observation (lots of observation), analysis and logic. I listened to what others said, teachers and parents and so on, and it took me a long time to understand what they were saying. In many senses, I grew up in my own world, and it made perfect sense to me. A sense I enjoyed. It was only on the social interaction thing that I experienced difficulties. But even at that age I would have appreciated a social skills practitioner on the staff. Social skills are the Achilles heel of Asperger's, and it results in many rejection slips from those important people in our lives – editors, publishers, doctors, teachers, parents. The results however have been a unique way that I and I'm sure fellow Asperger's view the world. It's as though the information enters the imagination side of the brain, and is then passed to the analytical side (I get confused between left and right), whereas most people respond and react analytically, then if they're lucky, use their imagination. I tend to think in pictures, or mental ideograms. I sense my information rather than try to understand it. In many cases, I don't understand it, which can cause rage, but that doesn't mean that I don't know what's going on. The hard-wiring of my brain has led also to the side-benefit that I know instantly when someone is lying, and that too causes irritation. Because I'm sure I'm not the only Asperger who has suffered for telling the truth as we saw it. There is also the conclusion that the hard wiring is in fact that. It is not possible to cure Asperger's, and no one should attempt to try. Give us help in social skills, but let us be. We're priceless!

**Andrew Weston-Webb**

### *Note from the editor*

Andrew, thank you for your letter. Of course, we should celebrate our differences. Maybe one day you could there should be a festival of Asperger art and you could read some of your poetry.





# How to reply to Pen Pals

- ☐ Please remember to let us know the full name (including surname) of the person who your letter is for.
- ☐ If you would like to write to a pen pal, please send your letter to Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.
- ☐ We will pass your letter onto the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.

## **Helen Colvin, Poole, Dorset**

My name is Helen Colvin. I came from London originally, but I now live in Poole, Dorset. I am aged 45, married with three teenage children. I work part-time as a special needs teacher. My pupils include a child with Asperger syndrome. When I began reading on the subject, I realised that this was my problem too, and this led to me being diagnosed in May this year – having spent most of my life wondering why I am the way I am.

I would like to write to people of my age group, particularly those who cope with a family and a job. I would also like to hear from anyone else who, like me, received a late diagnosis.

## **Martin White, Bristol**

My name is Martin White, 47 and I want a pen pal. I've been unable to get one. I'm interested in rock and roll and classical music, and I like things like 1954-1962.

## **Paul Forbes, Redruth, Cornwall**

I would like to have a pen pal. My name is Paul Forbes and I have Asperger syndrome. I like to go to the gym and I like swimming. I am 35 years old. I currently live in a residential home, going to the pub is something I enjoy but would really like to have more contact with other people with Asperger syndrome.

## **George Hendley, Nottingham**

I am a 21 year old male with Asperger syndrome. My hobbies are watching television, collecting photographs, shopping and 1970's music. I would like to meet someone female who is aged between 18 and 20 and likes similar hobbies and lives in the East Midlands area (especially the Nottingham area).

I have just been watching a television programme about people reaching their 100th birthday, and I wonder if there is anyone reading this who could be one of the oldest people who has autism or Asperger syndrome. How did you manage to survive so many years with it? Could it be the reason why you lived so long? Or have you even lived to see your telegram from the Queen? It would be very interesting to find out!

## **Anthony Cresswell, Nottingham**

My name is Anthony, I am 27 years of age and I live in Nottingham. I am interested in religion and spiritual growth. My hobbies include endurance exercise with weights and country walks. I like New Age music, stone circles, woodland, autumn colours, rain and thunder, stones and gems, the night sky, incense, aromatherapy oils, and massage, wine and organic ales.

## **Sandra Jackson, Ilfracombe, North Devon**

My name is Sandra, I am 33 years old, live in the North Devon area and was diagnosed as Asperger the latter part of last year.

For the last year I have been living independently and cope reasonably well. However, since I have problems forming relationships, because of my fear of communicating verbally, I find myself feeling increasingly isolated.

My immediate area has no facilities and little support for people like myself to network with others. This of course makes my situation worse.

I love writing and I would love to hear from others who suffer from the same day to day frustrations, to share ideas, information and friendship.





## An untitled short story by Vanessa Dickinson

I glanced at the clock which shone brightly in the dark and groaned. Slowly peeling back the covers, I swung my legs onto the icy cold floor. Ambling bleary eyed towards the bathroom I turned the tap on splashing cold water all around my face. Snatching the towel I caught sight of myself in the mirror, pulling a face in disgust, I stretched my arms, letting out a yawn. A huge pit arose in my stomach and I ached all over as I thought of the day ahead.

Another day of torment, being shoved, kicked and being called more names. Why did they pick on me I wonder, perhaps because I was an easy target. Carefully removing my clothes I now stood naked. I gazed down studying the wounds I had slowly inflicted so forcefully on myself. Raising my head, my movements slow, I climbed into the bath, sliding down, the steam now raising a delicious fog which coated the mirrors and rolled over the edge of the tub, creeping along the floor. I don't know how long I sat there when I heard a voice shrill up the stairs.

"Rosemary are you nearly ready?"

"Yes" I shouted back, "I'm coming". Quickly stepping out I rubbed myself dry, hurrying downstairs.

"Your eggs are ready" Mum said, sliding them onto a plate and putting them on the table. I shifted comfortably on my chair snatching my knife and fork up and digging sharply into the corner of the egg, the yolk immediately exploding. I had put away two mouthfuls when I noticed Mum's eyes keenly staring at me. "What's wrong? You never talk any more. Is everything alright at school? You look so pale." I gazed down at the fly which had firmly planted itself on the jam jar which stood in the middle of the table and now was beginning to make its way into the opening.

"Yes", I replied quietly.

"You go straight upstairs as soon as you come in and continually play that loud dreadful music".

"Everything's fine", I lied.

"You know you're welcome to bring friends home" she continued to say.

"I know" I said. But what could I tell her? I thought I didn't have any friends. So I turned back munching pragmatically on the rest of my food. Minutes later I said: "I've got to go." Turning abruptly on my heel I left the room.

"Wait!" Mum's voice broke. I stopped in my tracks, my face turning white. "Have a good day" and she kissed me on the side of the cheek.

Okay, so where did it begin? At school I was an outcast. The first few weeks were fine, I had friends, but then one day a boy said, "That girl Rosemary's really thick." And later he and his mate walked towards me saying "Stupid bitch", whacking me on the head and flinging my books to the floor. The others just laughed saying "Thump her again". But I was too scared shy to do anything and soon more people began to hit and call me names; by the end of the week nearly everybody had hit me. My friends saw what was happening and then they turned against me. After that I sat alone paralysed with fear. No-one talked to me, they all hated me, I thought. Everyday was a living nightmare.

Now, this was the first day after the school holidays, a typical day. As I slowly walked towards the gates, I recognised John and his mates. They were waiting for me, I presumed. I hesitated and swallowed thickly, my throat dry with nerves. I realised they hadn't yet seen me. They had their backs towards me and seemed to be watching something. Hurrying in and weaving in amongst some second years, I filtered in. I'd made it into the classroom in one piece I thought. I merely glanced at the teacher as she strode in. Carefully chosen, I had a seat right at the back of the classroom. It was the most convenient of spots, lurking in the shadows. Soon the room began to fill up with people chatting endlessly amongst themselves, recalling their springtimes of adventure.

"How are you doing? Did you enjoy your break?" John said. "It's good to be back, we've missed having you around."

Panic seized me and my hand began to shake.

It was one hour into the period when I became aware that I had drifted off into another world. It was not uncommon for me, I frequently did this. It was then I stirred and noticed the room had turned deadly silent. I saw the faces, all evil, staring back at me, all eyeing me.

"Shall I repeat the question?"

Completely ill at ease, jarred by the surroundings, my face burning red: "Yes", my voice quavering. My mind span as I tried to

think. I didn't know, but at least I could pretend, so I looked as if I did. So I took a few minutes, considering judiciously the first number that came to mind.

"No."

I turned for support. Then a hand went swiftly up. The bell rang, I stepped back, remaining a few minutes before leaving. I'd reached the second outer door when a cold hand fell on my shoulder and the voice I was dreading to hear. Almost instantaneously my bag was tossed aside, likewise a foot swinging right into the middle of my groin. I cried, sinking to the floor. The others crowded round me and I saw his mouth falling into a grin of pure delight, them throwing their heads back and laughing.

"What have we got here?" he said, emptying the contents. He passed them around. "Now let's see what we've got in your pockets." A hand thrust into my jacket, pocket money clanking.

"I presume this was for me" he said.

"Yes", my words coming out weakly, dropping at my feet. I jerked slowly as they shared my belongings between them.

"Catch you later." John said.

Maths period seemed to go quite quickly, the teacher giving us a task to do. Lunchtime, should I go to the lunch hall? What was the point? As soon as I would get something it would be thrown to the floor. Then I had a brainwave. The toilets! Yes, I would go to the toilets. As I pushed the door open I found myself colliding with one of Alice's mates. There was no escape and this wasn't the place to be.

"You ought to be more careful" Alice said.

"Yeah" replied Sonia.

Suddenly my arm was twisted behind my back. Zoe then going for my legs, forcing my body towards the toilet. My head was then lowered until my nose touched the murky liquid of someone's urine. Pushing the toilet's level down it was over in a flash and I was drenched like a drowned rat.

"Ha ha" they laughed, then they left. I peered in the mirror. What a sight I looked. It was 2pm, only one more hour to go and I would be free. RE was next.

"Please", Mrs Gibbon said. "Form several small groups and discuss religion".

Chairs squeaked noisily along the floor and bodies moved about.

"What about Rosemary? Who would like to pair up with her?" Mrs Gibbons said.

"Who would want to?" Zoe said. Crack remarks, too low for a teacher to pin down flew across the room.

"That's enough. Rosemary you join up with Matilda's group." I was lucky, Matilda was the only one who didn't mock me. When we had rationally discussed our topic I looked up at the big steel clock which clung to the wall. It was gone three o'clock. Hurry, I thought, if I want to make it in one piece. Seconds later the bell rang and I dashed madly out of the door. Sometimes I made it, sometimes I didn't. It depended on whether John and his mates got out before me. Running out of the main door I bumped into Mrs Smith, knocking her glasses to the floor.

"I'm sorry" I muttered, bending down to pick them up.

"Please don't run Rosemary".

"Sorry again" I mumbled. I crossed my fingers as I made my way towards the gate. Good, no-one was there. I was relieved, but still I jogged along the jagged pavement towards home.

#### *Reply from the Editor*

Dear Vanessa,

Thank you for your article telling us of a sad but all too common experience for people with autism and Asperger syndrome. I was bullied at school, although at the time I hardly recognised it as bullying. It happened so frequently I thought it was the normal way for people to behave. It is now time for this to stop.

Bullying in schools is a frequent occurrence and perhaps people with an autistic spectrum disorder get more than their fair share. Perhaps a letter to Mr Blunkett highlighting this issue would not go amiss! Let me know how you feel about this. Please keep writing Vanessa, we would love to hear how you are now.

John Joyce  
Editor



From visiting the Taj Mahal in India to listening to music recitals in Lucerne, Simon Barber writes about his travels.

## Visit to India, October – November 1995

**I**n 1995 I decided to treat myself to an exotic and exciting holiday. There are three reasons why I decided to visit India. First I am a railway enthusiast and I recall seeing the shots of Indian trains in certain films (especially 'Gandhi'). Secondly, it would give me a chance to see what poverty is really like, anticipating that Britain could end up like that as a result of the recession that is looming. Third, that year saw the 50th anniversary of the end of

**“Among the highlights of our tour was travelling on the metro-gauge Delhi-Jaipur railway, where we saw one of India's last remaining steam locomotives on shed; also a visit to the Taj Mahal in Agra (no visit to India would be complete if that is omitted from the itinerary)...”**

World War II and that my father was out there at the end of the war.

I made my booking in about June that year, after seeing a tour arranged by a firm specialising in rail-trains in one issue of the 'Railway

Magazine'. The tour cost about £1,700 and I decided to use some of my savings to cover the cost. Among the preparations were five different inoculations which I took about 5-6 weeks prior to departure; these were polio, typhoid, meningitis, hepatitis, tetanus, plus anti-malaria tablets which I had to start about one week before and finish about 2 weeks after the holiday.

I travelled with a very friendly small party of about eight people and I met my tour leader at one of the terminals at Heathrow Airport. We had a good flight to Delhi with Air Canada and we returned the same way with that same airline. Our tour leader had been to India several times before, particularly on business and Rotary Club visits. We all liked him very much and he was a retired civil engineer from Lancashire.

We arrived at Delhi in the middle of the night. When we made our way straight to our hotel (by minibus). We spent the first two nights in that hotel and saw a few sights which time had allowed us, including India's National Railway Museum and Mahatma

Gandhi's memorial, where we had to remove our shoes. We mainly travelled in the northern part of India, mainly by train but sometimes we used a minibus. All our train journeys were in First Class air conditioned carriages and so were our hotels.

Among the highlights of our tour was travelling on the metro-gauge Delhi-Jaipur railway, where we saw one of India's last remaining steam locomotives on shed; also a visit to the Taj Mahal in Agra (no visit to India would be complete if that is omitted from the itinerary); travelling to Simla (in the Himalayas) which was the summer capital of India during the British rule; Varanasi, Calcutta and Darjeeling. Our hotel in Simla was built at the turn of the century in British colonial style and whilst we were there having our meals, there was piped music being played which was western music. What was strange was that some early Christmas carols were played and it was only late October. Despite Simla's British connections, there were no other Britons in that hotel. When we were in Varanasi, we got up at sunrise to see Hindus bathing in the Ganges and we also saw a cremation at the same time. We were 2 nights in Varanasi and when we were out in a minibus we were caught up in a huge traffic jam; this was due to a drain that became flooded during the monsoon about 2 months earlier and the drain was still blocked!

Calcutta was one of the places we saw real poverty, including the sight of several homeless families 'squatting' in the town's main park living under sheets. We reached Darjeeling by travelling on a narrow gauge railway which was very run down and the trains operated by steam engines built at the turn of the century. What was remarkable was that the line contained many loops since it was passing through mountainous terrain. Darjeeling is also one place where my father was stationed during World War II. Needless to say, we visited India at one of the best times of the year and the heat was pretty bearable (less in Calcutta!), unlike what we had in the UK the previous August. Also we arrived back at Heathrow at about 10am on a cold and frosty November morning which was none other than Guy Fawkes Day (5 November).

## Visit to Lucerne Music Festival with my friend Robin Oliver, August 1998

Last summer both myself and Robin Oliver (fellow member of Asperger Network) spent about 10 days in Lucerne (Switzerland) for its annual festival. In the preceding spring I asked Robin whether he had any plans for a holiday that year and he replied that he would be happy to join me. After I sent him brochures for several different options, he decided that he would prefer the Lucerne Festival. That suited me very well since neither of us had been to Switzerland before.

Consequently I visited a local travel agent who very kindly arranged a package for us, which cost us about £450 per head and included train fares, our hotel, concert tickets and various other benefits. The benefits even included a Swiss rail pass which enabled us to travel on Swiss railways, buses and cable cars at greatly reduced prices.

Me and Robin met up very early one morning last August at Waterloo International in good time in order to catch the 8.23 Eurostar Service to Paris. We arrived in Paris three hours later after a smooth fast journey (especially on the French trains) and then we took a taxi to Paris East Station where we were to catch our train to Switzerland. Prior to that we had some lunch at one of the station's many cafes/restaurants. Then we caught a comparatively slow train to Basle, where we arrived in the evening. From there we took a train to Lucerne.

We got out at Lucerne station, which

has a bus station combined with it immediately in front before any road and at the same time we overlooked a river that subsequently flows into Lake Lucerne. Our hotel also overlooked the river on the other side and was in walking distance of the station.

As a matter of fact we only got tickets for one main event of the Lucerne Festival, since they were very expensive. We heard a splendid recital by David Barenboim, who mainly played pieces by Liszt. Our tickets cost about £40 each! There were several smaller fringe events at the Festival, of which we went to a few.

Apart from the music, we went on several excursions and saw several different sights in the town. On some occasions Robin and I went together, at other times we did separate things. We had a mixture of weather during our stay, and many people over there spoke English. We both did try to speak a bit of German in places like banks and restaurants! We were both impressed how efficient things are done in Switzerland.

Among the places we visited was the Swiss Transport Communication Museum in Lucerne (which reminded us of London's Science Museum) where we saw some early railway engines and also the Balloon Carriage used for the trans-alpine balloon flight in the 19th century; the kapellbridge in Lucerne which is 14th century and incorporates an octagonal tower (which was used as a torture chamber) and some 17th century wood

**“Apart from the music, we went on several excursions and saw several different sights in the town”**

paintings and an excursion to Mount Titlis which is 10,000 feet high and is reached by cable car. At the top of the mountain snow lies all year and had existed since 25,000 BC during the Ice Age.

We returned to London exactly the same way we arrived.

### *Note from the editor*

Two fine adventures Simon.

I have plenty of experience of French Railways (both Eurostar and SNCF) and can vouch for their comfort and speed.

I hope to go to India as I have a contact there who has provided information on autism in Delhi and I would like to visit them.

To all readers, please do send in any news about your holidays and adventures as we would love to hear about them.



# Poems Poems

## Untitled

It's becoming a kind of private hell  
Locked and withdrawn inside my cell  
A life of barren isolation  
Feeling loneliness and utter isolation

No matter how loud I shout  
There is no way I can reach out,  
No- one hears my pathetic calls,  
Trapped within these mental walls.

Over the course of many years  
I've sometimes broken down in tears  
The cause of discomfort a mystery  
As I wallow in this misery.

I turn to things like music for relief,  
From mental anguish and emotional grief,  
Though I'm not feeling my best,  
This is better than being depressed.

*Simon Hutchings*

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## On meeting a stranger

It's very hard to keep your balance,  
When a stranger, who by chance you meet,  
Reveals all his hidden beliefs,  
By acting out his hurts and grieves,  
His anger and his pain, by  
Being seen as such a lovely guy,  
While underneath his hectored smile,  
Lurks all the wit and all the guile,  
Of a master playing games,  
By putting people into frames,  
From which they find it hard to move,  
As though he has something to prove -  
His existence? Quite some feat,  
When a stranger who by chance he meets.

*Andrew Weston-Webb*

## Uzarize orizuzus (Use our eyes or eyes use us)

Who'yer looking at? Who'yer looking at?  
The children shout at passers by,  
As though there's something sacrosanct,  
About not being looked at in the eye.  
Of course they're told it's rude to stare,  
And so they learn to wrest their gaze  
From studying with care the World out there  
To listening to what their glimpsed mind says,  
And thus assumptions base our judgements made,  
And then we wonder why our World's so crazed.

*Andrew Weston-Webb*

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## Heart hard?

That this life is hard to bear  
Is evidenced by the fear,  
That lies behind the savage load  
On transgressors of our moral code;  
A code increasingly that's  
Transparent to its defenders,  
Whether Royalty or politician,  
Bureaucrat or businessman,  
Market trader in the street,  
Computerised, or with cold feet.  
The doctor, teacher, vet or nurse  
Chaplain, bishop, or even worse;  
Husband, wife or live-in lover;  
All are waiting to discover,  
The more we kick against the pricks,  
The further we go to get our kicks  
The bigger that we build the wall,  
The mightier will be the fall.  
The more we struggle to maintain,  
A happy life without the pain;  
The more our struggle turns to torture,  
As we vainly seek to know the future,  
A future shock awaits us all  
Before we realise that all  
That we could possibly want,  
Is still inside our beating heart.

*Andrew Weston-Webb*

# The voice of insanity – 1952

In order to survive this life, I've declared myself insane.

It's the only way I can stop the madness from taking me over again.

I used to do all the things I should, the things I expected of me;  
But over the years, when I thought I was good, I was on the verge of insanity.

People, ie the Government, say I have to work, because if I don't I'll be a scrounger,

Well, dear people, I did all that and my life began to flounder.  
What makes me mad, you see, is being forced to be part of this madness,  
But when I see all the beautiful humans being just plain stupid,  
I'm filled with great sadness.

Is it clever or stupid to drive a car, and spend all day in a jam?  
Is it clever or stupid to feed meat to cows, and for cows to go mooing mad?

Is it clever or stupid to offer houses to live in, without adequate insulation?

Is it clever or stupid to privatise water - then who owns precipitation?

Is it clever or stupid to make people work, until their health begins to suffer?

Is it clever or stupid to have a free market, where the only winner's a duffer?

Is it clever or stupid to use a machine that pollutes the atmosphere?

Is it clever or stupid to overtax the beer?

Is it clever or stupid to ban all drugs, and enforce their prohibition,

While the Underworld makes zillions, with rackets and prostitution?

Is it clever or stupid to show actors with guns on cinema and TV?

Is it clever or stupid to make mothers work before the child is three?

Is it clever or stupid for the Western world to spend half its GDP on defence?

Do you see my dilemmas dear people out there? None of it makes any sense.

As try as I might, I would never fight, for my king and my cuntry.

I'm a 'Conchie' alright, and try as you might, I'll not be part of this tomfoolery.

What stand idly by and watch people die and see old skills and culture vanish?

You must be mad to think I am glad that Escorts are now built by the Spanish.

Is being proud to be British now just a little bit skittish in the light of the European unity?

Or is there something more deserving about actively preserving what the dictionary calls 'community'?

Where people of like mind find their relationships thrive, when they do things and work together,

Instead of subcontracting out to a couple of louts, who couldn't give a toss with a feather?

If anything kills, its unfair competition, it makes everything a common denominator.

There's no free room for developing skills, and inventiveness by an innovator.

What say, we all up stumps and at 'em, and give the EU Commissioners the boot?

Let's turn UK Inc. into a theme park; based ideally on Fifty-two.

In 1952, all was well, the country made things to perfection.

Our streets were clean, our schools were full, and no child suffered rejection.

We went to the cinema on Saturday night, and ours was a happy nation.

So, forgive me, dear people, if I find it hard to accept our current situation.

For me, being part of the madness, would be worse than an amputation.

To enter the world of grab it and greed, would be sign indeed of my mental aberration.

You see, insane as I might be, I'm as insane as a night bee, and my insanity's an allergy to inanity,

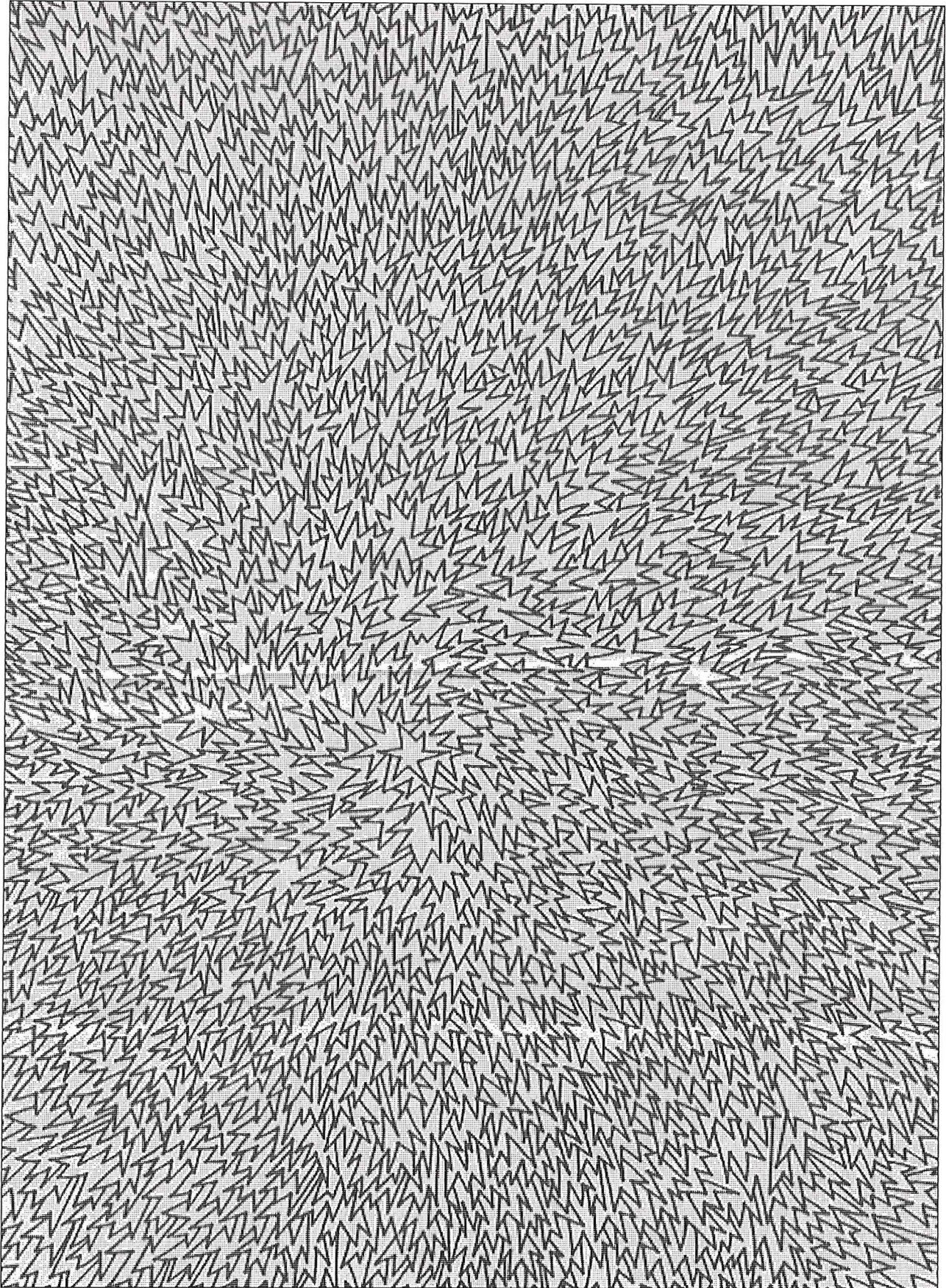
And so in order that I survive my life, I've had to resort to insanity.

So I walk the streets, in search of life's treats, and create poems without a hint of vanity.

Life is simple and fun; life is rich - I'm not glum and I'm overwhelmed by its synchronicity.

Andrew Weston-Webb





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