

Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

# *united* Asperger

Edition 40 October 2004



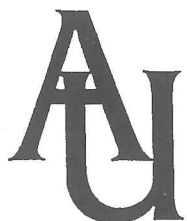
## Autumn

Autumn, autumn,  
It is Autumn  
The leaves are-a-turning  
The squirrel is-a-scurrying  
(for nuts)  
His tail is-a-flurrying

Autumn, autumn,  
It is autumn  
The swallows-a-part,  
Are-a-departing  
Brisk is the wind,  
Through leaves-a-whisperin'

And then the blast,  
The leaves fall a-fast,  
Indian Summer's now-a-past

**Tim Loder**





*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 free to people in the UK with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome. We ask for a contribution of £6 per year from overseas readers and £10 from professionals and institutions to cover postage costs.

**Editor** John Joyce

**Additional support** The National Autistic Society's Publications Department

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**Subscribing to *Asperger United***

Tel: 020 7903 3541  
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Email: asp.utd@nas.org.uk

All we need is your name and address and we will add you to the mailing list – free of charge to people with a diagnosis!

Thank you to George Cox who kindly produced the illustrations included in the Pen Pal Network section.  
Thank you to Graeme Lawson for producing the *AU* logo.

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

Contributions for the next issue should reach us by  
20 November 2004

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*Asperger United* was founded in 1993 by Pamela Yates and Patricia Howlin, in association with the Maudsley Hospital, and Mark Bebbington and Judy Lynch of The National Autistic Society.

This was in response to a recognised dearth of services for people with Asperger syndrome and the potential for self help and networking as a means of support for this group.

The provisions for editor's and sub-editor's post was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at. This post also provided the possibility of work experience and responsibility and has benefited those who have held the position. These are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds and the current editor, John Joyce.

Pamela Yates provided support and advice to the editors until the publication was handed over to The National Autistic Society in 2000.

The name *Asperger United* was chosen by the group of original readers as the most 'appropriate name' for the publication. This was suggested by Anna Cohen.

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Dear Readers

Welcome to the latest edition of *Asperger United*. Hope you enjoyed the Summer. I have just returned from my holiday in Spain and France. I spent ten days in Santiago de Compostela, half of the time in the University on an Open University residential week. An article on this city will be published in the next issue.

I visited Burgos whose cathedral museum contains the tomb of EL Cid Campeador (Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar). I then moved on to Lourdes.

It was a good experience. I had travelled to Santiago by bus then by train to Burgos and Lourdes. Home by air.

I recently attended the Aspergers conference in London. We realise that many of you were unable to make it so we have decided to publish the speeches in *AU*. It was an excellent day and well done to those of you who spoke at the event.

Please keep those contributions coming in. The next issue is due out in January and, as I won't get the chance to speak to you again until then, may I be the first to wish you all a very peaceful Christmas.

Your editor  
John Joyce



## in this edition

Cover - the artwork and poem for this issue was originally published in *AU* two years ago. The author/artist (Tim Loder) recently wrote to us to ask if we could publish them again in our October issue - to reflect the changing season.

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## The flat faces

I remember the name of the girl who wrote a book with the excellent title, *Martian in the Playground*; I think her name was Clare Sainsbury. That title is a revelation in itself. I have never read the book but one day would like to.

The title is powerful, a revelation, like if she hadn't used it I would have. I know exactly what she meant, though I've never met her; I know what she means and how she feels and, if I were to meet her, I would instinctively know what it is that guided her to write the book. Even though I know nothing of its contents, I would understand what she was writing about. We are different of course. Her obsessions and mine can never be the same but the understanding of why will always be there.

Her reference to the playground is the one thing that strikes me. When I was at junior school in London, I always imagined there was a railway line running through the playground. Not just any line, mind; this was the Liverpool Street to Luton line (I hadn't yet learned that Luton was served by the London Midland branch of British Rail). About a mile up the road there was the originator of this obsession in the real Liverpool Street to Chingford line.

When mum used to take me to work with her, she was stationed directly opposite the Highams Park railway crossing. I had an interest in trains before but this started this particular obsession. During the rush hour there were more than twice the usual number of trains using this line. There were the usual three car units preponderant on that line but there were also the four car trains with the same front and then of course, there were the 'flat faces' which were also a four car unit. These were christened 'flat faces' by my brother owing to their appearance. Seeing these was something of a novelty. No day was complete without seeing a flat face with its yellow stripe on one

of its carriages. The flat faces never stopped as they were being either stationed at Chingford or being sent to Liverpool Street for the covering of rush hour trains on the Bishops Stortford Line.

Combined with all of this knowledge and having had an interest in railways, it is little wonder that this would become a part of my obsessions in the coming months and beyond, with various other interests and obsessions.

As I said earlier, there was a line running right through our school playground. Of course there had to be a set of electric barriers in the middle of the playground for obvious reasons. These were christened the 'ding gates' by Stewart who lived next door, a reference to the real ones at Highams Park.

When I came into school in the mornings, the rush hour rail traffic was in full swing. In the ten minutes or so before the morning bell the ding gates would often have to come down with the passing of Luton - Liverpool street trains and vice versa into the station, which of course was the school itself.

As with the situation in the reality at Highams Park, there was the usual compliment of flat faces and other four car units, each with their yellow first class stripe and, as with reality, they also never stopped at the 'school station'. I was inclined to think that the flat faces never stopped anywhere but were always moving, like some sort of lost ghost. It became something of a campaign to find out why they didn't stop, where they were going and what was their reason for existing, if you like.

It was amazing to see one stationary, which of course I eventually did. I always think that there would never have been any railway at all if it wasn't for the mysterious flat faces

and the other four car units with the same faces as the three car ordinary units but with that yellow stripe, that used to thunder through the station on their way to who knows where. Did they have any seats or were they made just not to stop at stations at all? This seemed to fuel the obsession. I think it was the apparent normality of the three car units with their familiar yellow faces. They always stopped to let you on. They were goodies, if you like. Friends. You could almost see a smile on their faces.

In the rush hour they were coupled together in units of two and three to make six and nine car trains; though of course on the Luton trains they were extended to twelve car trains with four units coupled together. This policy of extending numbers to fit the obsession seemed to reoccur commonly in later obsessions as well.

During the day, of course, I used to get frustrated as the number of trains fell and during breaktimes there were only two trains. I could have recreated the rush hour again at breaktimes of course but there would have been no realism there and I found that difficult to work with. I knew I had the beauty of a system where I was the one in control, therefore I could do what I liked. I felt I still needed an element of realism. Otherwise I could not work it.

Again, I found this preponderant in later obsessions and it would often be a stumbling block preoccupying me for long periods of time. It would always concern me more than real things, which were always more important.

Things like numbers of units and colours were the main cause of anxiety. If I did get it right, it would always make things seem much better. My way of thinking and

*continued on page 5*

associating were the most obvious.

I can remember myself walking round the playground to the point of using my hands and fingers as instruments of this obsession.

The 'ding gates' would first go down. In that I would have to use my fingers as the 'ding gates'. After a few minutes a train would come in whatever form it was and I would

have to use my fingers, in various positions, sometimes quite complex, to represent the trains.

Of course all of this was performed physically in front of all. As you can imagine there were a few odd looks, but by then some children, usually the ones in my class, had come to expect it from me. This made it easier for me to do these actions in front of them without any concern.

It was however, more difficult to do in front of adults. My parents still, after thirty years, know nothing of any of this.

They knew about the obsessions, of course, but not what I was thinking. This is the first time I've actually put all this in writing, having wanted to do so for some time.

Jeremy Field

**Jeremy – we are sorry we could not publish the whole of your article.**

*Martian in the Playground* by Claire Sainsbury is available from the NAS Publications Department

Reference number NAS 424

£12 & £3.95 p/p

Tel: 020 8498 7844

Please see back page for special book offer



*Photograph by Julie Norman*

### History Mystery

Set in the city of York there is a park which features many attractions. There is a thatched cottage where various events take place. I went to a craft fair. People had spent many hours making beautiful things. There was a tearoom, where people were able to have refreshments.

It was a lovely day with people sitting in the sunshine, enjoying a cup of tea. With the green fields and trees, it was a pleasure to see.

Look at my picture. What does it tell you? The thatched cottage is set in beautiful gardens, and the people are

enjoying themselves. I wonder if anybody ever lived there. How long had the building been there? The attractions inside made me think that it was an old building, but there was no sign of anybody ever having lived in the building – everything had changed.

**Julie Norman**

*Many thanks to the author. York is indeed a beautiful city. Just a random thought - maybe an Archbishop of York once lived in that cottage*

*John Joyce (ed)*





### Dear John

Recently I have been getting *Asperger United*, because I think my problems arise from my being Aspergers' or possibly somewhere else on the ASD spectrum. I write music, and have succeeded in producing two relaxation music albums which are available in limited CD/cassette runs.

I have been wondering if my music would be of interest to other people with similar difficulties. They are quite expensive to produce so I would have to charge the cost of production plus postage, which would be minimal. If anyone is interested please contact me at:

**warren@martoc.demon.co.uk**

*Dear Warren – thank you very much for sending us sample copies of your tapes and CDs. It was very kind of you and very much appreciated. - John Joyce (ed)*

### The Nottingham Aspergers group - latest news

Hi to all our Asperger friends around the country. In future editions I'm hoping to review Asperger syndrome throughout the country. Initially I want readers from our largest ports to send items in – Glasgow, Liverpool, and Avonmouth – why? I am curious to know what the pensive experience of living in our most deprived cities is like.

What is it really like to live in a large city bounded on one side by the land and the other the Atlantic Ocean? Perhaps coming from the east Midlands we are curious as to how life is when we leave the pretty coastal stretches and experience life in our ports.

As for our own group in Nottingham - we are up and running, but several of us have started our own additional group run for and by people with Aspergers.

We meet in a pub in West Bridgford after the main social group. Soon we hope to link up with other regional groups up and down the country.

Our meeting in the pub went well and we discussed serious issues such as appropriate sexual conduct. We did struggle to take turns in the conversation and at times one or two of us became exasperated.

We are planning to meet up with our friends in the Leicester group. So if anyone living in the East Midlands would like to join us, call Michael on **07929 587 840** for more details.

**Mark**

### Asperger people aged over 55

It is hoped to start an Asperger support/social group in the Croydon area. We think it could be of interest to those who are over the age of 55 and have a diagnosis of AS or think that they might have it.

Please contact Reece Bell on:

**020 8763 2700**

or write via *AU*.

### BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

Many happy returns to  
*Asperger United* editor

**JOHN JOYCE**

who turns 60 this month

Very best wishes from all of your readers

### ASPIRATIONS

Imagination . Socialisation . Communication

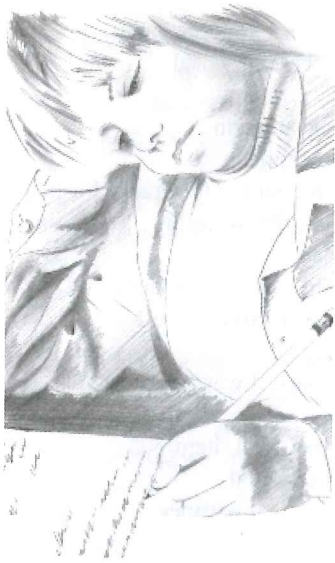
Aspirations is a new social/support group which aims to bring together young people with Asperger Syndrome who are over the age of 16 and live in the borough of Croydon.

If you are a young person with Asperger Syndrome and you would like to meet others for friendship, support or group outings please ring:

Vivienne Clark or Maria Wilson (Croydon  
Contacts charity no 1043106)

**Tel: 07981 182755**

or write to: Vivienne Clark  
c/o 31 Queen's Road,  
Beckenham  
Kent BR3 4JJ



# How to reply to Pen Pals

- Please remember to let us know the name of the person who your letter is for.
- To contact 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 on to the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.
- Please note that all penpal letters sent via *Asperger United* are opened before being passed on.
- Young people under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.

## **\*\*Important notice - please read\*\***

*Asperger United* is happy to publish pen pal adverts but we must stress that we are not a pen pal or introduction organisation. We do not match people up and we cannot monitor letters (other than the first one, that is sent via us) so please be cautious when releasing personal details in your letters. The National Autistic Society/*Asperger United* cannot intervene or be held responsible for any ensuing correspondence between letter writers.

Hi, my name is Edward and I'm 29 years old.

My main fascinations are dates. However, I'm also interested in 70s music, buses and coaches, ship-ping (particularly ferries) and cars. I also love animals and I'm interest-ed in philosophy.

I am constantly depressed and anxious. I would love to form a relationship with a female aged between 22-30. Interests do not have to match.

My name is Michael Feldman and I live in Ilford, Essex. I am 54 years of age and would like to hear from anyone aged between 40 and 60 years who is interested in socialising.

My main hobbies are home computing, digital imaging and photography. I am also interested in music, in particular, soul disco and motown. Also I like the old timers like Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennet.

I would like to hear from any single/widowed/divorced males living in the Sussex area in the age range of 56-66 who have been diagnosed with AS.

I am a 56 year old female Christian and would appreciate hearing from anyone who, like me, is disadvantaged by AS but still desires and would welcome friendship, mutual support, and shared interest/activities on a one-to-one basis. Please reply to SJC.

My name is Rhys and I have AS. I am 12 years old. My interests are football, cricket, playsta-tion games and reading. I like to listen to Eminem and Maroon 5. Pen pals of either sex, similar age in any area.

**\*\* Parental permission given**

## **Message for Rebecca M.**

Hi there, Amy here. Just a short note to let you know that I accidentally threw your last letter away, so I no longer have your new address. Please send it to me so I can continue writing to you.

Amy





## A glimpse of chaos

**Dedicated to Lynn Rixon, co-ordinator of the New Ground project, The National Autistic Society, Newport service**

I like to sit and reflect at night  
 Over the day that has gone by  
 I love to philosophise into every aspect into my day  
 I don't understand why I was told by one staff member not to  
 buy anything frozen at the shops today  
 Only for another member of staff to take me to Iceland  
 I can sit and think about that for hours  
 And bring it to the surface on a later date  
 The television set gives my brain some light relief  
 When it is talking my mind stops  
 The only other relief I get is when I am asleep  
 As soon as I wake up my mind does its news update  
 On the fantasy subbuteo world in my head  
 Even though I gave all my subbuteo stuff away  
 The characters are alive in my mind  
 I have an intricate knowledge of each and every one of them  
 Cos after all, I created them and I breathed life into them  
 They join a swirling loop of thought patterns  
 Of which I struggle to define boundaries  
 The characters I made with my teddy bears  
 When I was a small child  
 Have not yet been shelved away  
 My brain does not have any chronological order  
 What happened yesterday happened today  
 I try to fathom out every night  
 The things that haunt my mind  
 Why boys love girls and girls love boys  
 Why anybody loves at all  
 I think I'd find rocket science  
 Infinitely more easy to grasp than love  
 So I try every day  
 To appear to show love  
 But I am just going through the motions  
 In the hope that one-day it will just click  
 I'm dying to ask somebody about this  
 But who would understand  
 It's always taken for granted by everyone else  
 Whereas for me it's a constant source of scrutiny,  
 the bane of my life  
 However no one would probably ever tell me  
 So what's the point in asking a question if no one will ever  
 answer?  
 I wonder if people can tell I have a disability  
 I try not to show anybody but I think they can tell  
 I always appear so hunched up and awkward  
 Whenever my picture is taken  
 I freeze and frown  
 I don't realise I am doing it  
 I don't know why I do it  
 I take solace in how fortunate I am  
 I often look at some of the other people  
 within the services I attend  
 I feel sad for them and feel responsible for sorting them out  
 Then it occurs to me  
 That I am in exactly the same boat as them  
 I sometimes pop my head out

Of the hollow mist of which I am consumed  
 I realise that I am not in the real world  
 I begin to see the light  
 And then I withdraw back in again  
 I hope if I ever burst into flames  
 That I can muster enough courage to scream for help  
 I take great pride in hiding my disability  
 In being the best that I can be  
 I get so upset when it is hidden from others  
 Even though I have hidden it from myself  
 To others I am very strange  
 I used to think it was because I was not normal  
 But now I have realised  
 I am probably more normal than them  
 This is what makes me abnormal  
 I can see through neuro-typical pettiness  
 And I feel it is below contempt  
 From here on in  
 I will always be aware  
 That no matter how good or bad things get for me  
 I will never ever be as disabled as them  
 I feel so sorry for them  
 They will never enjoy the world in the way that we do  
 They seem so easily contented  
 I live my life in sheer boredom  
 I wish something would happen  
 That would ignite the old flame again  
 I used to be so excited  
 About each and every day  
 I used to be ill with passion and ambition  
 But it's all been bled away  
 Don't ever feel sorry for me  
 It's my own fault  
 I want the rewards without doing the work  
 Perhaps I am normal after all  
 There will have to come a time I think  
 When I have to stop blaming others  
 The buck starts and ends with me  
 It's only when I do this  
 That I will be truly 'responsible'  
 Until then I will blame every one else  
 I am getting sick of blaming my condition  
 And there's no way that I am ever going to blame myself  
 You'd think that Hans Asperger would do something more  
 useful with his life  
 Than creating such an awful disability  
 That was a bad joke  
 I think with that I will go to sleep  
 Oh I was only joking  
 I'm not saying that he really did create it  
 I'm not saying that it is funny  
 I'm off again  
 Shut up Joe  
 Go to sleep.

**Joe Powell**



### Aspergers and me

If you have Aspergers  
You don't know what to do,  
You don't know which friends are false  
And which are true.

You are the centre of attention  
Though you may not want to be,  
People ask you to do silly things  
But that just isn't me.

My mind is sometimes elsewhere  
I get distracted from my task,  
People don't always understand me  
Or the questions that I ask.

Though it's supposed to be hard  
I've made loads of friends,  
I have lots of good skills  
I hope that never ends.

We are all special  
A unique different kind,  
But there is something better  
The thing we call our mind.

In my brain you'll find Aspergers  
In a few tiny cells,  
The world is full of feelings  
And colours, sounds and smells.

**Andrew Risbridger age 13**

### A vampire

Sharp teeth for piercing skin.  
Claws for defence and killing.  
Psychic mind for moving objects from a distance.  
Muscles five times as powerful as humans' for  
jumping high, fatal blows etc.  
Good sense of disguise.  
Twice as intelligent as humans since they invented  
colour TV in the Tudor times, so that they can avoid  
traps etc.  
Jaw can extend quite far for stronger bite.  
Different digestive system to cope with digesting  
blood.  
Heart encased in bone so that stakes are useless,  
having evolved from weaker vampires who were more  
vulnerable.

**Brett Hope aged 13**

Happy Halloween !

*This short story came suddenly to me when I was  
16 years old (I'm now 33). I think it is  
somewhat/somewhat an aspie story ...*

### An Aspie story

A young guy lived in an ordinary town, ordinary  
except for one thing: it was surrounded by a  
completely empty plain that extended all the way to  
the horizon. One afternoon the guy went for a  
walk. It was sunny and there was a soft wind  
blowing. Some children were playing in the street  
and some old people were drinking tea in the  
doorways of their houses. It was a small town and,  
when he walked too much in one direction, after  
rounding a corner suddenly, he faced the plain, flat  
and white as marble, extending to the horizon. So  
the town began to get smaller. Houses and  
buildings began to disappear.

More and more often the guy found the plain, and  
changed his direction. Also the streets began to get  
wider until, because of the decreasing number of  
houses and buildings, and because of the widening  
of the streets, the plain began to be seen in any  
direction that one could look.

This continued to happen until only 12 buildings  
remained in the town, then eight, then four...  
Finally the town disappeared completely and the  
guy remained in the middle of the plain, empty all  
the way to the horizon, with the sun fixed and  
unmoving in the sky.

**Pablo Frank**

### Useless Inventions by Tom

Sugar coated toothbrush  
Solid drinking straw  
3-way mirror  
Liquid newspaper  
Dust mite cage  
5ft 2ins paperclip  
Camouflaged letterbox  
Lead filled ping-pong ball  
Breakaway walking stick  
Diamond coated loft insulation (for the extremely  
rich!)  
One piece jigsaw  
Rubber tent pegs  
Newt whistle

*Interesting ideas Tom - perhaps other readers can be  
clever enough to add more - John Joyce (ed)*

*John Joyce (ed)*

## Born out of time - A Browning

I have Asperger syndrome, dyspraxia, dyslexia, sensory integration dysfunction, dyscalculia and ADD.

I was not born for this technical, fast paced life. I was meant for a hermit like life out in a tiny, quiet country village, where the only sounds are those of animals or the occasional chime of a church clock. My country home would have a smallholding where I would grow my own organic and natural food and raise free range hens. I am not some sort of idealist 'flowers round the door' dreamer but genuinely suffer ill health from most modern life.

My sensitive digestive system means that processed foods and foods full of additives give me severe IBS and allergic reactions. I need pure, simple food.

The noise of traffic, mobile phones, loud music, especially from walkmen and loud stereo systems, the sounds of machinery, clanging and banging all hurt my brain. The pollution gives me asthma, central heating makes me over-heat and I feel so sick that I cannot use public transport, or use many shops in winter, because they are ridiculously over heated. I go to college in my coolest summer clothes under my coat on a winters' day because the heating is set so high that I cannot work properly.

The fluorescent lights hurt my eyes and head. Everything is all computer and technology orientated, then there is the 'get, get, get' culture in which we live, where we are brainwashed into desiring plasma TV sets, flashy mobile phones, state of the art stereos and computers that do everything but go to the toilet for you.

The noise, chaos, speed and pollution from this hideous age in which we live has caused me to suffer chronic fatigue, asthma,

anxiety, depression and possibly even infertility brought on perhaps by my use of the pill in my twenties, against my own will.

When you have severe sensory issues like me and many other Aspies, modern life is a daily struggle of coping. A day out even doing something wonderful like looking at old buildings and cathedrals and looking around flea markets is rendered traumatic by the noise, public transport, unnatural lighting etc you cannot even find a nice genteel tea room these days, one where your tea is in a china cup without the tea bag still being in the cup (or these days a mug), one where quiet classical music is played and you can read a book or a paper without being disturbed by someone's annoying mobile ringtone. No, it's all 'Starbucks' and coffee shops selling over priced beverages which are not even that special.

I want to walk down to my local shops and buy my groceries from local businesses and markets, something I do actually try to do, where I can buy my fruit and vegetables from the farmer and not some multinational supermarket complete with its over stimulating assaults on the senses.

Living simply and locally with my family and friends in the same village, where we share work and childcare - small places where I would be happy to do hard physical work if it means living in harmony with the earth.

As it is, I am proud that I do not own a mobile phone or PC. Our TV and stereo are small but at least we can hear them and not our neighbours and half the street. We do have computer consoles but that is my boyfriend's hobby. We don't have all the latest gadgets and get by with a twin tub washer because our kitchen is small. We are on sick and

disability benefit and struggle to make ends meet at times, but I enjoy the challenge; recycling things, mending things, and going to second hand shops etc. I used to be married to a well off man and had everything I wanted but I was utterly miserable.

I am allergic to this life and would prefer to have lived in old times, yes life would have been harder. It would have had its own struggles, I might not even live as long, yet going by my grandparents I would stand a good chance. They were rural farm labourers who had no inside loo until their 60s but lived to their 80s and 90s and used to make their own entertainment. Their Christmas days for instance were far more fun than those of today's gluttony, over spending and watching rubbish on TV all day.

Some one beam me up out of this world to one where my senses are not under constant assault and there are real winters with snow and ice. Ok I know I would still be the local eccentric, the stand offish, rather anti social mad cat woman, but I might have even been revered as the local wise woman, who knows.

All I know is that I've noticed how more prevalent ASD is? Is that because more people with different thinking, sensory and perception differences are struggling to live these days? Who knows.

### A Browning

Mad, eccentric, opinionated cat woman, aged 37.

Sorry to all you gadget, shopping mall technology lovers out there.

*Hope you find peace - John (ed)*



*On 13th September 2004 the first ICASA/STEPS conference on Asperger syndrome took place at the Institute of Psychiatry in London. For the benefit of those who could not make it to the conference, we are going to serialise the various presentations over the next few issues. The first speaker was Lorna Wing.*

It is a great pleasure to be here and to welcome everyone to this meeting. I'm very pleased that the title of the conference concerns people with Asperger syndrome and high functioning autism. I am one of those people who have always considered that Asperger syndrome is part of the wide autistic spectrum. In the rest of my brief introduction when I say Asperger syndrome I shall mean both Asperger syndrome and high functioning autism. There may be some differences between these two subgroups but the similarities are far greater.

Before you get all the up-to-date ideas from the rest of the speakers in the conference, I would like to touch on a little bit of history.

I guess everyone here knows that Asperger was an Austrian paediatrician working in Vienna and that it was in 1944 that he wrote his first paper in the German language on his special children. However, as Sula Wolff has pointed out, as early as 1926 a Russian woman psychiatrist published a paper concerning a group of children who were virtually the same as those Asperger described.

Although Dr Ssucherawa wrote nearly 20 years before Asperger, I think that Asperger deserves to have his name attached to the syndrome because he had such empathy with the way the children thought and felt about things. His suggestions for interacting with them and helping them cannot be faulted. They are just as useful today as when he wrote them.

I once had the pleasure of meeting Professor Asperger over tea in the canteen in this Institute – I am sure he would have been delighted to know that this conference would be taking place.

Uta Frith has pointed out that adults with the pattern that Asperger described can be found dotted around in the historical literature. One was a 12th century Franciscan friar called Brother Juniper. His behaviour was rather unusual because he took all the rules laid down by Saint Francis absolutely literally, to the extent of giving away all the clothes he was wearing to a beggar in the street. The other brothers decided that the reason for his eccentricity and naïve innocence was his extreme holiness.

Uta Frith also mentioned fictional characters with Asperger syndrome. Perhaps the most famous is Sherlock Holmes. This famous detective is much admired by the most recent fictional character with Asperger syndrome in the book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*.

Asperger himself said that features of his syndrome were essential for great success in the arts and sciences.

A lot of people who rank as geniuses fit the picture – people like the scientists Sir Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, the composer Sati, and the painter L. S. Lowry. This is the fascinating paradox. Individual people with Asperger syndrome have achieved great things and have changed the world. Temple Grandin said that in prehistoric times sociable people probably sat around talking about their feelings towards each other while those with high functioning autism got on with inventing the wheel. But the other side of the picture is that people with Asperger syndrome find it hard to understand and fit into the social world. The way they take things literally and speak the truth, regardless of what anybody else thinks or feels, and the way they pursue their special interests regardless of any other considerations often gets them into a lot of trouble.

They need understanding and support as children to help them fit into school and many still need support and help as adults. To a person with Asperger syndrome the social world is a crazy puzzle. It would be much better for them if everyone had Asperger syndrome. The trouble is that people with Asperger syndrome are in a comparatively small minority (though not as small as once thought) so the sociable people impose their way of organising life even though it does not always work out in the way they expected.

Probably people with Asperger syndrome have existed from the time that homo sapiens first evolved. However it was not until the 1980s that the term Asperger syndrome was coined and Asperger's work began to become well-known in the English-speaking world.

Uta Frith's translation into English of Asperger's original paper in 1991 carried the process forward another big step and now Asperger syndrome is very familiar to professional workers and many other people as well. This has had a number of effects. One of the most important and interesting is that people with Asperger syndrome have become aware of themselves as a special group. They are forming their own networks with the aim of helping themselves and each other. Their skill with computers and the Internet has been especially helpful.

Life will never be easy for anyone with Asperger syndrome but it is good to know you're not alone and that you are in some excellent company. This conference is a significant marker of progress along the road.

**Lorna Wing**

### Anthony's Group

My name is Anthony and I'm a 28yr old male from New York City, USA. I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in 2001.

I'm the manager of an on-line group on MSN for adults with Asperger syndrome. The group is entitled **Anthony's Group**.

**Anthony's Group** is for adults with Asperger syndrome and also for adults who think they might have AS. Currently the group has 28 members from all over the world. Members can post practically anything they want on the message board, as long as it's appropriate. There are weekly group chats and members in the group are supportive to each other. The group has been in existence for about two years. We are always open to taking on new members.

The address of the group is:

**<http://groups.msn.com/Anthonysgroup>.**

If you have any more questions and/or comments please email me at:

**[antscl@msn.com](mailto:antscl@msn.com)**

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks!

**Anthony**

### Book offer - *Martian in the Playground* by Clare Sainsbury

Clare has Asperger syndrome. She wrote this book using her own experiences of school life and those of other people with the condition. She offers a beginner's guide to Asperger syndrome, thought provoking chapters on inclusion, labelling, normalisation and life after school, along with helpful advice on enabling children with Asperger syndrome to learn.

*Martian in the Playground*, like all the best books on autism and Asperger syndrome, is available from NAS Publications. It costs £12, plus postage and packing.

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