

Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

united Asperger

Edition 44 October 2005



©Steve Gist 2005




The National
Autistic Society



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

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:

Asperger United
c/o The National Autistic Society
393 City Road
London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7903 3595
Fax: 020 7903 3767
Email: asp.utd@nas.org.uk

Subscribing to *Asperger United*

Tel: 020 7903 3595
Fax: 020 7903 3767
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. Items may be edited for publication.

Contributions for the next issue should reach us by 1 December 05.

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.



Dear Readers,

Welcome to the latest edition of your magazine and thanks for the high level of contributions.

I would remind readers that direct reference by name to other people is not acceptable because of the possibility of being accused of libel if the article published detracts from the character of the named person.

Hope you have all had a good summer holiday. Mine began unhappily with the death of my father on 15 July. Though he was 92 and his health had not been good during the previous year, his sudden death was still a shock. Since then I have been to Lourdes again, the 25th year in succession, and completed my Open University Spanish course, the exam taking place on 7 October.

I propose to continue with the OU and am taking courses with my local Adult Education College.

Hope any of you who attended or participated in the NAS event in Leicester Square on 25 September enjoyed the day.

In October 2006 the next World Autism Congress takes place in Cape Town. I hope to be there myself and would like to see some of you there.

Please may I ask you all to continue sending in high-quality copy.

Thank you
Your editor
John Joyce

Reconnection

Deep down you go: blue view dreamer
Back here you are in control
Out of step with the World you see
That others enjoy but not for me.

Bit by bit you claw back up
You fight the pills and the pain
No emotions, sound sleep or peace
Will you ever see the Sun again.

Yet hope is there since very young
Your self esteem a little better
No instant cure: life is hard
But best for you your choices are.

There are people keen to help
You feel connected: out of yourself
As it is: just as you are
Then comes dignity from afar.

Quiet and stillness are there for you
Mother Universe's way best taken
And after all is said and done
Realize you're not the only one.

Peter

in this edition

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| Editorial / poetry | 3 |
| Feature article by Daniel | 4-5 |
| Story translated by Steve Gist | 5 |
| Letters to the Editor | 6 |
| Pen pals | 7 |
| More pen pals / letters | 8 |
| Poetry — Solo Climber by Colin | 9 |
| More pen pals / letters | 10 |
| Letter from Eugene | 11 |
| Feature — The Autist's Lament by SB | 12-13 |
| Appeal from DS Linney | 13 |
| Poetry — Faces by Gay Eastoe | 14 |
| Feature article by J. Smith | 15 |
| Epilogue: the Knight / Book Review | 16 |

Inside the window of my mind by Daniel

Our world is full of obstacles, some of which are more difficult to overcome than others. The difficulties we have that are associated with Asperger syndrome can make the only world that we can understand the one that we can retreat into when this one is too stressful.

Every individual is different making the world an interesting place to be in, although people with Asperger syndrome sometimes have some gift or talent in one thing or another. These have usually developed from a special interest. A special interest can come in any form, large or small, regardless of its complexity. It is this that will occupy a great part of their time. Sometimes it can become the whole of their lives, everything else almost non-existent.

Some of the world's most respected scientists, artists, writers and musicians have been suspected of having one of the spectrum disorders. They have devoted their lives to their craft, constantly striving to achieve their goals.

On a personal note, I am going to talk about my obsessions, some of which have been short-lived, others lasting ages. So far my whole life has been a mosaic of special interests.

I had my first obsession when I was nine or ten years old. This was the time that my parents split up. I was also moving house and moving to a new school, so it was a very stressful time.

In the beginning I had two goldfish. Goldfish are a common pet. A short time passed before my interest in fish began to grow at an alarming rate. On the container for the food flakes was an address for a company called the Tetra Information Centre. If my memory serves me well, there was a doctor there who was one of the biggest specialists in all areas of fish keeping and of course, being only ten years old, I decided to write off to the company as well as other fish associations for information about

fish. Gradually I collected loads of leaflets and posters. Books followed on from there and my school work was taken over by drawing fish.

I didn't like any of my teachers because they were very impatient and of course there was the odd smack, which was allowed then. I was one of those kids who got shouted at all the time.

As time went by, I started to develop an interest in cats and dogs as well. Other animals were included in my world. I contacted the RSPCA and WWF for information on the things they were doing to animals and there was another organization for students that was against animals being experimented on or mistreated. This was only the beginning of what would be a long association with animals that goes on today.

My other interest is ancient civilization, the Incas, the Aztecs, the Maya and the Olmecs. All of these were connected with central and South America, but I was intrigued by myths of a gold city and its king, Eldorado, who was pasted with oils and covered with gold dust.

For a long time, I didn't read any more about the subject of exploration, because I was only around fourteen years old and had got into the world of bird watching. Binoculars and a year's membership with the young ornithologist club set the way for the next four years. My long days out, walking for miles, enjoying the peace and quiet away from the noise of the world's cars, people and stress.

My years of bird watching came to an end when I had an accident which left me unable to continue all the long walks that I had managed before. I managed to keep it going until I was seventeen and by then I was developing inflammation in my hip, so I decided that it was time to call it a day. I started taking medication for the problem and found that I could still ride a bike, so I went out on that. I'd always ridden

and I am still flying about, slower than before but my love of mountain bikes and a Raleigh Chopper which I had as a kid has remained, even after twenty-five years.

In my last few years at school, I developed an interest in guitars and started going to a small club run by two of the school teachers. My first guitar was a folk guitar. For anyone who has had one, they are tough on the fingers at first but you get used to them. I learned my first set of chords and was pretty pleased with myself.

At this time, I was into rock and heavy metal music. Not many of these guitarists actually play with an acoustic guitar; they use electric guitars, so I was going to move on to that. My only description of how my guitar playing actually began is similar to when man discovered how to make fire – by sheer accident. Those strange sounds that I got from the strings eventually developed into power and barre chords, the main sound of the electric guitar.

After nearly thirteen years of playing the guitar, my longest obsession to date, I am still enjoying it and I'm getting better.

My interest in the world of the ancients is still very much alive and well, in fact it has gone further into the realms of the ancient astronaut theory, namely *Chariots of the Gods* written by Erich Von Daniken. Astronomy has sprung out of the interests of above and of course the same usual flow of books about the subject has also grown to quite a significant number.

My diagnosis for mild Asperger syndrome gave me and my family a clear idea about why I do the things the way I do. Now I have developed a way of living with my impulsive mind. That is one obstacle that I have nearly overcome, and more will follow throughout my life.

Interests and obsessions can lead to careers, particularly if the individual is extremely involved in whatever it is that they are doing.

The Child Psychologist

Translation from the Italian © Steve Gist 2005

"Today, children simply refuse to obey," said the famous psychologist, whose reputation spread far and wide — "they refuse to accept the wisdom of their parents. In the case of your son, Antonio, my dear madam, you don't need to worry about it too much. If he leaves his clothes on the floor instead of putting them on the bed, don't criticise him. You just have to understand their hang-ups and say to them, for example, 'this hook (rule) is in fact a present for you . . .' that'll teach them how to understand everything . . ."

So, the next afternoon, Antonio returned home and went into the sitting room. At his feet on the carpet, lay a book. Antonio walked straight past it without picking it up. His mother, remembering the advice of the psychologist indicated the book as he'd said, saying in her softest tone of voice:

"Tonino, what's that on the floor?"

And Antonio replied: "a book, mamma."

"Watch where you put your feet. Pay attention. You'll fall over the book otherwise," and she was just about to grab him by the scruff of the neck, when . . .

"Don't worry Mamma, I am listening."

"Tonino, what's the title of the book?"

"The Marriage Vows of Manzioni."

"That's an interesting novel."

"Yes, Mamma, I finished reading it a week ago."

At this point, Signora Aeillo began to lose her patience because the book was still on the ground. "Antonio, you have to tell me the truth. You appear to be blind, deaf and incapable of understanding Italian. But why don't you pick up the book? You don't need me to give you a hand . . . I always have to pick up your socks, your tie, your clothes are always all over the place . . ."

"Mamma, be calm. If I have to pick up the book, why didn't you just say so?"



letters to the editor

The author of the letter to Lorna Wing appears to me to have no idea of the difference in thought processes between persons with autism and neuro-typicals. He is unaware that AS is more than a label, at least in my case, knows nothing of genetic blueprints and their intrinsic nature. He would know something about same-system compatibility. He would know that his brain can only function when presented with facts, false evidence and lies not being admissible.

N-T psychology relies on duplicity to support its self-proclaimed superiority.

Though it is not possible for everybody to get on with everybody else, electronic communication, together with honesty and precision, would reduce the tendency of N-Ts to pass their work off as adequate data transfer. Because of this medium there would be no issue of trust because double standards and deception would not exist.

Can Planet Asperger exist? Not if attitudes expressed in this letter are prevalent. For both AS people and N-Ts it is advisable to inform oneself before commenting on other people's opinions.

Yours
Cornish

The Editor writes:

This letter, in its original form, does not seem to fulfil the requirement of not "criticising what he don't understand" (to quote Mr Robert Zimmerman, alias Dylan). I am afraid he does not understand that the author is an AS person. Secondly people do not necessarily have to know about individual scientists. Flawless clockwork operation is a pipe dream and would probably bore even AS people.

Dear readers,

In response to several queries about noise-cancelling headphones and artwork, the Editor has suggested that I take the opportunity to introduce myself: my name is the Goth, and I am the new NAS contact for AU. Some of you will, I know, be sad to know that Tania, my predecessor, has left the NAS. She will be missed here too.

I have High-Functioning Autism, hypersensitive hearing, a degree in physics and have spent fifteen months in salaried employment since I graduated in 1991, although I have also tried to set myself up as a hi-fi consultant. Therefore, I can tell you that noise-cancelling headphones are available to order from many good retailers and vary in price from less than £50 to much, much more. If anyone has a specific recommendation, please would they contact AU with the information. Alternatively, ear defenders, sold by some hardware stores, look similar but cost only £4.

Artwork for publication is best done in black and white, but if you have a piece in colour, please still send it in for consideration, as we may still be able to make a good black and white version. The best sizes to submit fit into one column (half the page width), or are half or quarter of a page, but pictures can be resized as long as they are no larger than A4.

Dear Asperger United,

As I have Asperger syndrome I am interested in disability issues.

However, I do, unfortunately, have experience of a wheelchair user wanting to put me down.

I wonder if any other readers of Asperger United have had a similar experience?

Yours faithfully,

Michael



How to reply to Pen Pals

- Please remember to let us know the name of the person whom 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 pen-pal 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 advertisements 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 letter, 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.

Hello everybody,

My name is Mark and I am a 27-year-old male who lives in the North-East of England. I have Asperger's syndrome and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and am currently studying for my second degree at Teesside University.

I would like to communicate with people who have Asperger's syndrome — both men and women.

I like meeting people and hope to enter the Great North Run this year.

I am interested in the Internet, dustbin lorries and researching Asperger's syndrome — I have 37 books on this so far.

Please get in touch if you would like to,

Mark J

My name is Helen, I am 29 and live in West London. I learnt about having AS at the age of 22. I wish to hear from other Aspergers who are into heavy metal and glam rock music.

I'm also interested in cats, gardens, all forms of art, old memorabilia and museums.

Can be young adults of either sex, from any region.

Hi. Name is Mark and I am 32 years old and I have AS and I live in Glasgow. My interests are sports, football, reading, watching TV, going to see musicals, theatre, sightseeing, going to pubs and nights out and travel and my obsession is golf.

Please be careful to mark letters for Mark J with "Mark J" and those for the other Mark, "Mark, Glasgow", thank you.

Hi, really great to hear that *AU* is increasing by four pages.

I was very interested to hear about Ametrine Ruth Lavender's experience and pleased that things are now looking up for her. I recently went for an assessment for Asperger's after asking my doctor for this. Unfortunately the experience was not a pleasant one.

When I arrived for this the psychiatrist asked me what I had come for. I was asked no questions relating to AS, eg. whether I had any rituals, childhood interests, etc. The onus was completely on me to think up and supply the relevant info which, obviously had I not asked other people including Autism Helpline beforehand, I would not have known to do! The main bearing of the interview seemed to be on my parental relationships. At the end of the interview the psychiatrist told me that there was no Asperger's and that my problems were all to do with my upbringing. He further said that I could not have AS as I had had a long-term relationship and, furthermore, most people would be glad to find out that they did not have this terrible condition (yes, his words!).

However, he did agree to arrange for a second opinion. However, in the light of what happened next, I promptly cancelled the second appointment, feeling that its only purpose would be to confirm the first opinion.

After this, having heard a few other horror stories, re AS assessments and misdiagnosis, I was really worried about what might be sent back to my doctor as a report. I was right to be. When it arrived, the doctor was reluctant to let me see it but eventually let me have a copy to take home. Many statements were so different to what I had said that they were untrue. Eg. I mentioned that I read the dictionary exclusively of other books as a child, which ended up as: I was always looking things up in the dictionary. There were a couple of statements which I did not make and a hint that he couldn't rule out

something more serious but didn't think it was likely! (Perhaps he thinks I should be glad about this, too!) Whilst it is not an actual diagnosis, the fact is that this letter is now in my medical file. I really was sorry I had asked for an assessment at all.

However, I did come up with a solution as it occurred to me that since AS is a learning disability, I should try going down the educational route. I also have some difficulties reading and writing so I checked in straight away for a dyslexia screening. This is something I would suggest others in my situ. may do as many of the traits are similar to AS, it is a recognised disability and help is more readily available. The test found that I had hyperlexia (which can cause some dyslexic symptoms) which includes autistic traits and is commonly thought of as being a part of the spectrum. This did need picking up as I do need help where some types of reading esp. in employment are concerned. I also needed to get the correct type of glasses — prism glasses which help the eyes to come together when reading. I have to say that I was pleasantly surprised to find that the optician was actually an expert on dyslexia/hyperlexia.

In conclusion, I think it is really important that people write in with their experiences of assessments. If anyone is thinking of keeping a database so that this can be monitored, it would be a good idea. Whilst I am pretty shocked about what happened, I seriously can't allow one pathetic man to ruin my life, especially with all the positives here. My advice is that if you look for the help in the right places, it is out there. Keep up all the good work!

Jane

Anyone who responded to 'Colin, 45, Christian living in Essex...' in the last edition, please write again as he has evidence that letters for him have been going astray in the post, thank you.

Solo Climber

*I have Asperger
syndrome and I
wrote this poem
some time ago which
commemorates
a sort of non-
relationship between
myself and a friend
who probably also
had Asperger
syndrome, though
neither of us knew it
at the time.*

You're an independent person, dressed for comfort, not for show,
minimum of fashion, figure better than you know,
diligent and capable, but something holds you back,
keeps you from the sunlight; is it confidence you lack?

You're happiest as a loner, living behind a fence,
you like to greet your neighbours and you smile for your friends,
cheerfully conversing across the garden wall,
but you'd sooner dream in silence than have guests in the hall.

You're a solo climber,
eyes to the skies and the wind rippling in your hair,
longing to go higher,
perhaps you only feel alive in the open air.

You've tried your hand at several trades, you're not afraid to learn,
why don't you seem to credit your skills which others discern?
You don't have to hide away, you can thrive in the light,
be what you were meant to be, put your doubts to flight.

I wish I could have managed to help you on your way,
inspired you somehow to move away from shades of grey,
but I'm a creature of shyness too, reaching out is hard for me,
and you judged rightly; within your walls you have no need of me,

For you're a solo climber,
eyes to the skies and the wind rippling in your hair,
always seeking higher,
into the realms where few but the eagles dare.

Should you ever come across these words, I hope they won't offend,
I'd want you to remember me as a well-meaning friend;
but what I didn't know back then, I now suspect is true —
I've a similar set of mind and that's why I needed you.

I too am a solo climber,
eyes to the skies and trying to challenge my fate,
my hope of going higher —
trusting my God for a route that climbs to heaven's gate.

Colin

My name is Jack and I am aged 24. I have Asperger syndrome (AS), but can drive cars, ride horses and bicycles, play organs and pianos, sometimes for concerts, and even repair houses to a certain extent. I am not boasting but, even though some people say that people with AS can't do certain things, I can do a lot of things that many people can't do. Sometimes I get underestimated, but nobody really knows what AS is. People can't get inside other people's minds, no matter how hard they try.

My magnificent obsession is steam trains, maybe because of the excitement, power and speed, etc. But all the time the train is safe on the track, nice and controlled. My favourite steam train is Flying Scotsman, who I first met at the age of four. Despite the 100mph record broken by City of Truro (another favourite train of mine), Flying Scotsman is the 'king' of the rail network, so far as most people are concerned!

Really, the point of this letter is about making friends. I want to meet people of similar ages to me, enthusiastic, like-minded, obsessed (ho ho) individuals. It doesn't matter about gender but, like everybody else, I would like to meet the girl of my dreams and charge into the sunset, ideally on a train pulled by Flying Scotsman.

I joined an Asperger's group, which meets once a month and they all seem to moan about AS and the fact they have it. I don't complain about this and think it is wise not to. But everyone is different and God doesn't make rubbish. AS or not, I am just myself. The trouble is, many other young people sometimes get drunk or take drugs. This makes them speak a funky language, which I can't understand. Tricky making friends.

If someone would like to write to me about puzzling behaviour of other youngsters (the other animals), maybe together we could laugh and chat about it. Also we could probably understand a bit more.

Jack

Following David Shamash's open letter to Lorna Wing, I'd like to respond to Lynne Moxon. I was at last September's conference but I wasn't one of the lucky few who got to ask a question.

First I'd like to say how downright lucky the youngsters of your area of North-East England are to get such extensive sex education as you offer. All I got was the Tampax nurse at Year 8 and a Marie Stopes rep giving us the lowdown on contraception in Year 12. That was nearly ten years before I was finally diagnosed.

Lynne, I'd be interested in your thoughts on whether women with Asperger's syndrome find it easier than their male counterparts to form relationships. This has been claimed on more than one website; one American site even claimed that Aspie women have more success than neurotypical women. As a woman who, at nearly thirty, has never had a relationship, I don't know how typical I am.

As for the questions that did get asked at the conference, I'm concerned that you gave an inaccurate answer to the chap who wanted to know the meanings of "snog", "go to bed with someone" and "pet". You said that "snog" meant "kiss" but it's more specific than that. For the benefit of that chap, and any other readers who don't know, snogging is kissing in a sexual manner: mouth-to-mouth and sometimes involving touching tongues. You would not sign off a letter to your auntie with "Love and snogs"!

Another speaker whom I would have liked to ask a question (but missed out) was Declan Murphy. One of his slides was a scattergraph that showed that hippocampal glucose metabolism declines with age for women but not for men. What does that mean in practice? It sounds ominous!

Louisa

I am 22 years old and have diagnosed myself as having Asperger's after years of thinking I had social anxiety or some other social disorder. I have been meaning to write this letter for months but could never get round to it. Over the years it has blighted my life; try as I might I have never truly broken out of it. If it were a case of 'thinking positive' I would have done it by now.

I found counselling helpful at university which got some of my problems properly defined, however the counsellor knew no more than I did about social inadequacy and was quite pushy at times. I went to a psychiatrist and was told that I had nothing wrong with me — I challenged that decision — doctors are wrong anyway about these things.

I lost my job at Lloyds TSB because I couldn't multitask. While I was unemployed the Job Centre and New Deal did little for me. I was patronised by people who didn't care. It still upsets me and has made me a lot more cynical.

I am really clumsy and take hours to do anything because I tend to idle, daydream and philosophise. I can't really see the point of trying sometimes because I never seem to get anything from interacting with the world.

I owed it to myself to make an effort and I did — in one great leap forward at university three years ago when I created my own society, joined a social anxiety group and had counselling. I also gained my driving licence, which is my most important possession.

I am pleased I have made progress and showed my true potential. After all that I am now stuck in a boring job where all day I input data. I have started painting and writing poetry to express my feelings and relieve boredom.

I never really knew what I wanted to do but ancient history and archaeology are now interesting me so I might go and work in that area. But as with all jobs, social skills and contacts play a part in this and I can't see myself getting very far.

I tend to daydream a lot and this helps me more than it hinders me. Sometimes I find inspiration in daydreaming. Sometimes I imagine what it would be like to be in love and married and have kids but I cannot ever see this ever happening in real life.

I want to do more social activities but I can't because I have no-one to do them with and I don't connect with people well. I cannot really go to the ice rink on my own, I cannot go bowling alone, and I am hopeless at physical sport, so I wouldn't join any teams.

I want to go on holiday to places like Rome and Venice but wouldn't want to go alone, I'd want to share the experience with someone. I feel embarrassed about telling anyone this. I can't go to a restaurant alone, I can just about go to the cinema alone but I feel really left out when other people go out with friends and family.

I can't make friends at work. I'm always the last to know something and never know how to fit in with the banter and the gossip of the crowd. The people I know at work I can't talk to and even when I do they think I'm weird. I don't like talking about *Neighbours* and who's getting drunk with who on Saturday night.

I am feeling better today than I have done for a few months. This letter has been immensely cathartic after years of a burdened mindset.

Eugene

The Autist's Lament

by SB

There are now many books on how to make life easier for autistic children — parenting, schooling, etc. I was diagnosed at the age of twenty-nine, and for me it is all too late. High-functioning autistic people don't fit in anywhere. 'Too bright' to count as having learning difficulties, and the condition in itself isn't a mental illness. Like many other HFA people, I get depression, but the only thing I get regularly from the local mental health team is swimming. I can't exactly talk to the swimming pool about relationships, depressed feelings and wanting to have the chance to get my skills to flourish. Perhaps just as well since, when one of the ladies used to take me to lunch every week, if I mentioned anything that was bugging me, she would just laugh.

Before the diagnosis, I was feeling that there was nothing left for me in life. The diagnosis gave me a boost — now I knew why I found socialising so hard, and why I found it so hard to 'sell myself' (artwork, cartoons, etc) — especially as there is so much emphasis on competition and being able 'to sell a fridge to an Eskimo'. I wondered if new opportunities would open up for me. Luckily at the time I had a social worker, and now one day a week I go to an excellent day centre. But the social worker left to have a baby. Earlier this year I was taken to meet the man who was to be my new care coordinator. The next week, he left. At the day centre, due to their status, they cannot promote my art or woodwork skills.

All around me I see facilities for people with learning difficulties — day groups, college courses, housing, etc. I feel that organisations such as Social Services appreciate their difficulties more, and that they are more 'lovable'. I am aware though that they are sometimes taunted by nasty children, but I feel that more neuro-typical people care for them

than they do for autistic people. We face hostility in other, often more subtle ways from adults, people that might assume we are mentally ill or on drugs. My town has two blocks of sheltered flats for people with learning difficulties, but none for autistic people.

When I was at secondary school I was subjected to incessant verbal, physical and emotional abuse. I am aware that autism wasn't so easily recognised in the early 80s, but because of my lack of interaction with other children, a habit of talking to myself loudly and taking bits of paper out of bins to doodle on, they jolly well should have seen that something was amiss. It did not help that my first-year form teacher was cold, hard, psychopathic and only interested in competitive sports. Would they have allowed a child with a learning difficulty to endure all that? That would have been unacceptable, sheer cruelty. The compensation "sue 'em" culture makes me wish I could sue my school, but for something that went on 20 years ago, would I have a leg to stand on? I often wish I could talk about my hang-ups (not to my useless mental health team), but for now there's only the 'swimming pool' to talk to.

I know somebody who has a learning difficulty, and, I think, is also a touch autistic (not diagnosed). He wants to leave home and is aged nearly 40. On my advice he went with his mother to the council housing department. He was given 500 points. I don't know if council housing points system differs from council to council or not but a few years ago problems in my flats made me want to move. My council gave me 40 points. If you want to move and you've got less than 150 points, forget it. In 2001 when I was diagnosed I explained my change of circumstance to the council medical officer. I now have ... 40 points.

Regarding the autistic youth who was recently convicted of killing a little girl. I feel that a mental health secure unit would be a better place for him (he was sentenced to life in jail rather than to be detained indefinitely under the *Mental Health Act*). Despite having a learning disability he was classed as having Asperger's. If he had been classed as having a learning disability (but with autism as well), would they have treated him differently due to 'diminished responsibility'? However, another youth with Asperger's who was involved in a case where some teenagers murdered another teenager, was detained indefinitely in a secure hospital rather than be imprisoned. Prisons have a lot of bullying and a pecking order, which I do not think autistic people can cope with.

I am sometimes afraid that people with Asperger's will end up with the same reputation in the tabloid papers that two other groups of people that I am in (people with mental health problems and people with tattoos) have. There are, at least rules now that should stop papers insulting people because of their mental health problems (such as *the Sun* getting into trouble with their 'Bonkers Bruno' headline), but can discrimination laws stop papers insulting people because of their ASD?

While on discrimination, I find nowadays a lot of discrimination against bus enthusiasts, bus enthusiasm being very popular with autistic people. I detect covert disability discrimination, but that's another story.

PLEASE READ ALL FOLLOWING WORDS CAREFULLY.

Only reply if you are sure you have fully understood. If you are neuro-typical ('normal') get an ASD (Autistic spectrum disorder) to read + explain. I am NOT being patronising, but serious.

THIS CONCERNS LONG-TERM, PAID EMPLOYMENT.

I want to hear from ASDs (Asperger/autistic) or their carers, families, friends etc. who know + understand them. I DO NOT want to hear from, or about, so called 'supported employment' organisations, 'employment advisers' or ANY such persons.

READ ABOVE PARAGRAPH CAREFULLY, AGAIN.

Are any ASDs currently in paid, long-term employment (a year or more) in the UK or English-speaking country, but NOT cleaning, laundry or factory work?

IF YOU ARE SUCH AN ASD, OR CARER/FAMILY, ETC.,

ie. you have PERSONAL EXPERIENCE or KNOW such a person, please write in + give all details of how you got the job. Every single detail is important. READ THIS AGAIN BEFORE CONTINUING.

ALSO, is there a SHELTERED (not 'supported') workplace anywhere in UK for ASDs, MENTAL HEALTH OR LEARNING DISABLED people which is willing to take a 43-year-old living in NORFOLK? PROSPECTS + MENCAP will not deal with people in NORFOLK area.

IN A FIVE-YEAR SEARCH, I + MY CARER HAVE FOUND NOWHERE + NOBODY in NORFOLK + SUFFOLK who even listens. ALL so-called 'supported employment' organisations are useless or worse – legally we are unable to name them to warn other vulnerable people. THEREFORE, WE ARE LOOKING ACROSS THE UK + ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD for a PERSONAL RECOMMENDATION from SOMEONE WHO ACTUALLY UNDERSTANDS.

DS Linney

Faces

Faces everywhere
On their own
In groups – two or more
Different shapes
Black, white or brown
Thin, plump, fat
Youthful, mature aged
Old and wrinkled
Diseased, disfigured
Always changing
Happy, smiling
Warm and friendly
Sad, and morose
Unhappy and frowning
Blank, serious
Cold, dismissive
Difficult to read
What do they really mean?

It is the eyes which hold the key
They are a real fear for me
Looking into a head is really what I dread!
Eyes-staring, peering, gaping, judging!
But where to look – how perplexing!
Over the shoulder and far away
Perhaps a view with unfocused eyes
Or a quick little peep – then eyes to the floor
What to do is the question
But where to find a suggestion
People do not understand the predicament of eyes
Care must be taken when I speak
Never to look at a face, especially the eyes
If I do then what a dilemma
My speech is stammered, garbled and blurred
Words are mixed up – in the wrong order and slurred
Drunken and disordered is how I sound
But no this is AUTISM – how profound
Sometimes I have no words
My mind is blank – I have to think
What to do is a problem
I search my brain, but often in vain
The words don't appear – as I fear
Feeling a fool I want to vanish
So stressed and agitated, I stand banished
No one to help – no understanding
So feeling alone, with head bowed
Eyes to the ground
I move forlornly from the crowd
Sad I am and close to tears
I contemplate past years
There must be a way
To break the spell
To let all be well
Perhaps, just perhaps one day

by **Gay Eastoe**

Thomas the autistic tank engine

by J. Smith

'There is truly no comparison between this stumpy-domed, 50-year-old legend and any cult idol.'

Dedicated and loyal fans that have seen the show through since it began back in the late 80s believe that the recent eighth season of *Thomas and Friends* is a miserable let-down. Being one of those fans, I can easily sympathize. This afternoon I sat down to watch two new episodes: 'Thomas Gets It Right' and 'As Good As Gordon'. Not only did I feel disappointed at the amount of clichés and sugar-coated nonsense narrated by a clearly fed-up Michael Angelis (not to mention the embarrassingly repetitive storylines that were clearly recycled plots from previous seasons), but watching these episodes made me realize just how Thomas has changed since the days of coming to breakfast in stationmasters' houses, falling down a mine and learning that it is wise not to take water from a lake.

But then, a slogan appeared during the closing credits — 'Making Tracks To Great Destinations' — and like a god-sent arrow, something seemed to strike me inside.

Having taken a moment to think it over, I ask you this: should dedicated fans really be concerned about the new tracks laid down for Thomas?

Reading that slogan, I was struck by a feeling that made me think. These might not have been the best two episodes to date with simply no comparison to the delights of the classic first and second seasons, but I realized that HIT Entertainment is not corrupting the world of Wilbert Awdry. They are simply a charming idea as a vehicle to prepare children for the future. Everyone needs a 'special friend', and in particular, I feel that Thomas provides that special friendship for those whose particular needs lie along the Autistic Spectrum. When I learnt that Thomas had been selected as the mascot for the National Autistic Society, I couldn't help but feel touched, and I realized why I had reached this stage of my life still holding on to a great love for Thomas.

I strongly believe that the choice of using Thomas as a flagship for the autistic community is an excellent one. I found that I could relate to every single reason drawn up for this choice and I realized just how much good the Reverend had done when seeking to entertain his ill son. Until recently, I too adopted the attitude of the many loyal fans who believed that the show's new and educational approach would mark its downfall. As a strong believer of realism, I sympathize with their views. However, as someone who lives in the world of Autism, I have learnt to take on a new appreciation for the future of Thomas.

Thank you, Mr Smith (Ed.).

Please note that this is an extract from a much longer article: anyone who is interested in reading the whole article may write to or e-mail Asperger United at the usual address and the full article will be sent.

The Knight by Brett

One day, a knight was getting a briefing on his quest to rescue a fire-breathing dragon in a depression so it raided towns for beer, and people wanted their beer back, so he went up to Death Mountain and gave it anti-depression drugs and they lived happily ever after.

Book review

Managing with Asperger Syndrome

by

Malcolm Johnson

There have been many books written on work-related issues in the workplace for those with mainstream autism, but none offering advice and guidance for those with Asperger syndrome working in white-collar, professional management positions — until now!

Managing with Asperger Syndrome, written by Malcolm Johnson, provides a detailed account of someone with AS working in a professional capacity along with the issues and difficulties that they have encountered — and also the actions that can help mitigate and overcome them.

Starting with an outline of his early years, and the AS-related issues that dominated his life, Johnson then illustrates how they transposed themselves into a work context. The book proceeds to discuss issues such as identifying the right working environment and the conditions that suit, and bring the best out of, someone with AS.

It then moves on to convey and examine different contentious issues: Corporate Politics, Managing People, Forming Relationships, Trust & Honesty, Confronting Issues, Problematic Personalities, Voicing of Opinions and

Productivity & Efficiency — all areas that present challenges for someone on the autistic spectrum in a professional work context.

The book provides a highly constructive framework, describing the issues within a business setting and how the approach of a person with AS can compound issues through to actions that can prevent them occurring in the first place. Specific topics are examined closely via 'box' texts that discuss them specifically and each chapter ends with a list of key development points for future ameliorative action.

Striking a balance between the limitations that the condition places and the demands that a typical white-collar, work environment places, *Managing with Asperger Syndrome* provides invaluable, practical guidance and is available via Amazon online booksellers (www.amazon.co.uk) and all good bookshops.

Managing with Asperger Syndrome,
Malcolm Johnson, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
ISBN: 1 84310 199 8

Malcolm Johnson can be contacted via his
e-mail: malcolm.johnson1961@hotmail.com



Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road,
London EC1V 1NG.
Telephone: 020 7833 2299. Fax: 020 7833 9666.
Email: asp.utd@nas.org.uk
Website: www.autism.org.uk

