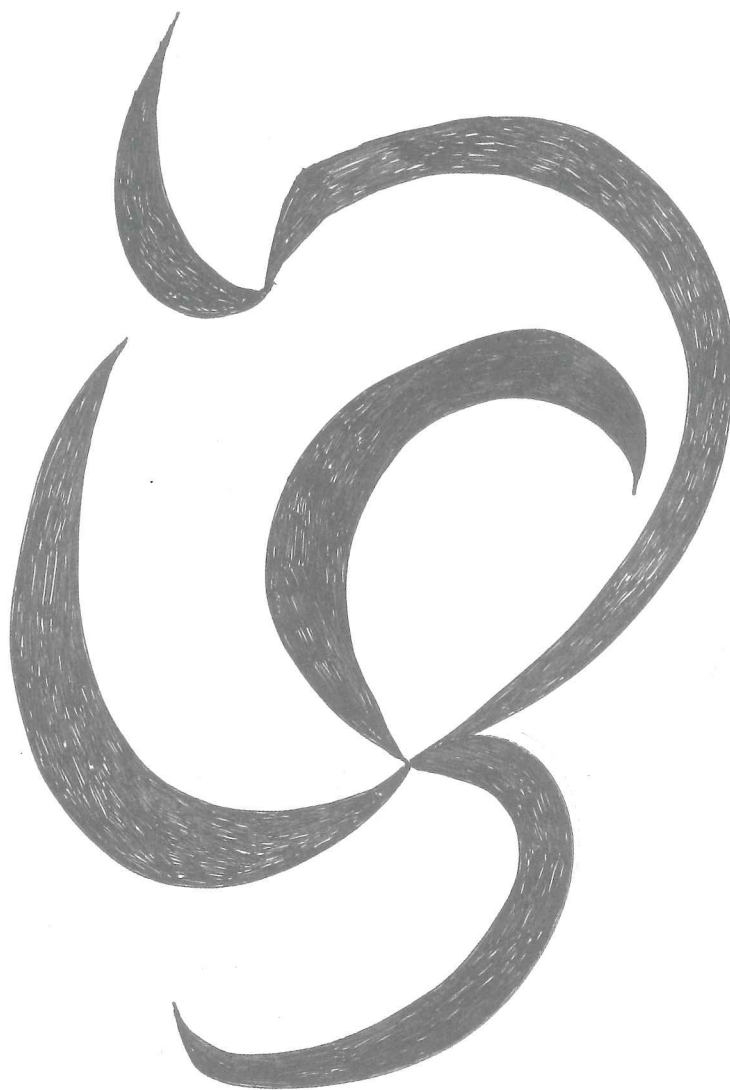


Produced by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions

Asperger *united*

Edition 48 October 2006



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Asperger United is a newsletter run by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions. 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.

Please note that *Asperger United* receives over 200 letters each quarter so it is not possible to respond to every one, nor for every contribution to be printed.

Asperger United is free to people in the UK who are on the spectrum. 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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All we need is your name and address and we will add you to the mailing list — free of charge to people on the spectrum.

Thank you to George Cox who kindly produced the illustration included here and on the pen pal page, and 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
17 November '06

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 provision for the editor's and sub-editor's posts 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,

Hope everybody has enjoyed the summer holiday, even those who went nowhere. I await an autumn holiday in Cape Town, for the World Autism Congress, to add to my visit to Lourdes in August.

A new trend in the history of your paper has begun. From now on you will be able to download it in PDF form. This is to make it available immediately to new subscribers with web access. Everyone who already receives it will still receive it by Royal snail mail.

You continue to provide us with outstanding material, much of which would not disgrace the

allegedly better quality organs of the national press. Thank you. May things only get better.

For those who remember AU's earlier anthology, would you like a second such production? I am sure it would not come amiss. Also, I see from the material provided for this edition evidence of persons with some musical skills, other than "singing" in the bath. If there are enough musicians and composers among us can we bring together a band or a choir?

With these thoughts I close, and be the first to wish everybody a Happy and Holy Christmas and all the blessings a New Year may bring.

Your "geriatric" editor, **John Joyce**

in this edition

Announcement

For all those who would like to read *Asperger United* on their computer

Asperger United is now available as a PDF on the NAS website. Go to:

www.autism.org.uk/aspergerunited

and click on the words
"Asperger United (PDF)"
at the bottom of the page

The current issue is available to download, but will be replaced with the new edition when it comes out.

If you have trouble reading the PDF, there are instructions on the web page to help you.

The print version will continue
— you do not need to do anything to continue receiving the magazine through the post.

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Dear Sir,

A couple of things with reference to issue 47.

Firstly, the article by Neil, *Sex, sexuality and Asperger syndrome*. I have not read either of the books he mentions, although my wife and I did look at *the other half of Asperger syndrome* and have been married for twenty-five years.

Much of his article is fine, but I disagree with the sentence, "I think we have the ability to move quickly from one relationship to the next". This just does not fit in with the key difficulties faced by Aspies and I personally have never been capable of this. I did not meet my wife until I was 29 and she was my first sexual partner.

Also the section "Aspies are unlikely to be aroused by provocative pictures unless it depicts an existing sexual partner and they can relate images to specific experiences. This is due to the lack of imagination and weak central coherence inherent in AS." My experience as a younger person was that provocative pictures were the only way of getting aroused as, until I met my wife, the very few relationships I had were a disaster. I did all the chasing and would get obsessed, so I stayed lonely for years.

Which brings me to the poem by Tee Randall, *Checking out*. I think this should not have been published, good though it is. I used to write poetry in my younger days about depression, loneliness, etc, but I would never have dreamed of getting it published, except perhaps posthumously. However I tore the poems up shortly after my marriage.

The last thing those of us who have tried suicide need is to be reminded of those awful times. Life will never be perfect but it can get better.

James

I am writing in response to Neil's article, *Sex, sexuality and Asperger syndrome* in issue 47. His penultimate paragraph reads "Aspie women differ from Aspie men as far as sex is concerned, *appearing* to divide into two separate camps. Some do not *appear* to want or need sex in their relationships and find the whole concept repugnant, whilst others have a very open and adventurous attitude towards it." [My emphases.] Neil recommends two books which he used as source material. I would like to challenge this opinion, which is based on appearances.

For the purpose of this article, I will call these Group One (Aspie women who appear not to be interested in sex) and Group Two (Aspie women who are interested in sex). Interestingly, Group Two are not just interested in sex, but are said to have an "open" and "adventurous" attitude towards it. Two-dimensional, polarized stereotypes of this kind are always worth a closer examination.

Firstly, I believe that nearly all women, whether Aspie or NT, find sex with the *wrong* man "repugnant". The "wrong man" in this sense is very nearly all men, as nearly *all* women are by nature content with just one partner in their lifetime — perhaps two or three. To say that a group of women find sex repugnant becomes meaningless in this context, as it probably only means the individual women themselves have yet to find their soul-mate.

Secondly, I believe that nearly all women, whether Aspie or NT, would have an "open" and "adventurous" attitude to sex if they were lucky enough to find the right partner.

The ominous thing about this part of Neil's article is that it presents the two groups as being somehow distinct from each other, or mutually exclusive, as if Aspie women are irrevocably destined to remain in one or the other. It is more realistic to say that

individual Aspie women are either celibate (for whatever reason) or sexually active — just like anyone else in fact.

The only difference with Aspie women is that they have greater difficulty in finding a partner than other social groups — as I attempted to show in my article in issue 45. There is nothing inevitable or static about this, and it really only reflects the intolerance, ignorance and prejudice of the wider society that so many women from one social group are unable to find a partner, and don't think it worthwhile, or don't have the know-how, to look for one.

Of course celibacy is a legitimate lifestyle choice for anyone, but I don't think so many Aspie women would choose this if social conditions were easier for them. I think that for most Aspie women, celibacy is imposed on them by circumstances.

I ask the following hypothetical questions to illustrate my point.

1. Would you dismiss a group of wheelchair users as having no interest in visiting their town centre, if the town centre in question made no provision for wheelchair access?

2. Would you dismiss a group of visually impaired people for having no interest in their local museum, if the museum in question had no resources to access them by auditory, olfactory or tactile means?

3. Would you dismiss a group of hearing-impaired people as having no interest in social interaction because they never seem to know what people are saying to them?

If the rational answer to these questions is "Of course not!" then why should the answer to the following question be any different?

4. Would you dismiss a group of Asperger women as having no interest in sex, if the only

prospective suitors available to them are men with no knowledge or understanding of their special problems, who make no allowances for them, have no patience or interest in them, who see them as a two-dimensional, asexual stereotype?

Pinning a stereotype of the Group One kind on celibate Aspie women can only make their social situation worse, as any potential suitor, believing it to be true, will simply dismiss them as not worth bothering with. You create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Pinning a stereotype of the Group Two kind on sexually active Aspie women that makes them out to be some kind of sex siren, could lead them into all kinds of misunderstandings with the wrong kinds of misunderstandings with the wrong kinds of men. This part of Neil's article is not only misleading and unhelpful but could be dangerous to the women he is misrepresenting.

I realise he accepted his source material in good faith but, as a logical Aspie woman, I know it is incorrect on this point, and I have written to the two authors (via their publisher) to ask them to make the necessary correction in any future editions of their books. If I receive any replies, I will send copies to *AU*. Perhaps one, or both authors, would be willing either to explain themselves or retract the idea in a future edition of our magazine.

Thanks for an otherwise interesting article, Neil. Please don't take my criticism of one paragraph personally — it's just that no-one ever is a mere stereotype.

Elizabeth

PS. Grateful thanks also to *AU* contributors J and Anne in issue 46. If someone had said things like this to me when I was a teenager, I think my own life could have been different.



Dear Asperger United,

I'm Andrew (40) and realised that I had AS when I was 35. I'd like to take this opportunity to inform readers about a club called Outsiders for those who are isolated, and also to discuss the wider issues of isolation due to AS.

I live independently and work full-time; however I have fairly weak social skills and this can be difficult in some situations. I am a 'late developer' and missed out on normal social development during teenage and early adult years. As a result, I did not have a circle of friends though I was keen to have one.

I came across a club called Outsiders, which was set up to allow those who are isolated to meet others. They hold monthly lunches in London (and other venues) where anyone is invited to attend and meet other members, and find friends or a potential partner. The club has many more male than female members. Many of the male members have some sort of autistic condition, though some join due to a physical impairment. Most female members join due to a physical impairment, though a few have autism/AS. The club also produces a list of members' names (for members only) to enable members to correspond without attending one of the lunches. I have found club members to be very tolerant of those with special or diverse needs. The club has been very helpful for me, because I have made a number of friends, and I also found a short-term partner, with whom I was in a relationship for sixteen months. There is a club newsletter, and I recently submitted an article about AS. However, I was annoyed to see that the editor cut out a fair chunk of the article without my permission.

Despite the club's help I'm still in a catch-22 situation. To make new friends, I need to improve my social skills, but to improve my

social skills, I need friends. I'm involved in local societies such as amateur dramatics and astronomy, but these do not provide the chance to meet new personal friends. There is a big market for internet dating and telephone chat lines, but these simply do not work for me. I can only socialise with new people face to face. This is a bonus of attending Outsiders' lunches.

Whilst I enjoy the Outsiders' events, I need to have additional chances to meet people, and other opportunities are limited. Speed dating events are a good idea but a little intimidating; also there aren't many events for those over 35 and not in a large city. 'Lock and key' parties sound good, but are generally only available in London. I sometimes attend singles' dinner dances, but these are expensive and always require an overnight stay in a hotel. My wish is for more local events for those on their own, for whatever reason.

Regards,

Andrew

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Please note that all publications reserve the right to edit pieces submitted to them — this goes for AU as well. This is because they need to fit the pieces into the space available, to comply with various laws, such as libel and the Data Protection Act, and to present all pieces in the "house style". AU does not have a house style for content. Ed



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 pen- pal letters sent via *Asperger United* are opened before being passed on.
- Those 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.

I'm David, 43, lived on my own for past eleven years. Would like anyone to correspond with, hopefully with similar interests! I enjoy sport (mainly football, motorcycling, tennis, and snooker/pool), music (mainly rock) but have an eclectic taste! cinema, animals and the countryside, walking, cycling, humour, philosophy, reading, writing, ufology and the paranormal. I live in Wombourne between Dudley and Wolverhampton, but love North Wales. Thanks in advance!

I wonder if you can help: I used to live in a group-type home in '94 called Crossways at Mildenhall, before getting my own about a year ago. I was friends with another Asperger's person called Ben. I used to keep in contact but the last time I rang it turns out he has moved house. Can you please help me, he was last heard of at the Firs, but moved from there some time ago.

According to directory enquiries his folks were still at Blackheath, London, up till 2004/5. Hope you can help.

Thanks.

James

Hi. My name is Alex and I am 16 years old. I live in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, and I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome when I was three. My interests include playing on my PS2, my PC, the internet, cycling, watching news and documentaries on TV, films, and anything that is hot news. I am also diabetic, so unfortunately I have to live with not one but two challenging conditions.

It would be nice to talk to someone who understands Asperger syndrome.

Hello. My name is Gareth. I am 22 years old and live in Suffolk. I was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome at the age of seven. I am still suffering in some way, as for the way I have lived most of my life so far, eg. growing up with the wrong people in the wrong environments. Like when I was at a boarding school that was mainly for people with severe behavioural disorders. It was all just like being a little boy kidnapped and driven away to and abandoned in the middle of a great big wilderness and then trying to find my way out in the wrong direction and without realising it. Inevitably, this eventually caused depression, which became severe.

However, I am now over most of that thanks to all the professional help I started seeking, first of all by seeing my GP. I also think that everything I have been through has helped me learn ever so much. I am now so much wiser and more aware of things. I have recently realised that AS is not a bad thing — that it is not something to be taken as a bad sign. It does make us different to other people, but not inferior — the brain has developed differently, but not badly. I always keep well out of the way of trouble. Nothing is ever further from my thoughts. It is just almost impossible for me to find people who I would actually like to be friends with. It is basically as if I am looking for a needle in a haystack. I just want to find friends who I can actually enjoy spending my time with and have things in common with as well as AS.

My two main interests are cars/small automobiles and travel & tourism. My other interests include geography; nature and wildlife; TV sitcoms, some drama serials; AS and other similar autistic spectrum conditions as well as just having one; collecting souvenirs; IT/computers. I am currently trying to get in contact with and subscribe to autism/AS organisations like this one to chat to and get to know other people in the same or any similar situation. I hope to make some friends from it. Please take all the time you need to contact me if you so wish. I do not intend to cause anybody to feel under any pressure to do so. I will be fully understanding of what it can be like.

Hi, my name is Martin, I am 28 and live in Bedfordshire in a care home for people with Asperger's.

I was diagnosed with Asperger's when I was 25. My interests are computing, music creation, listening to music and spending time with my family and my mates.

I have a wide taste in music, ranging from classical music such as Cage, Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt, Satie up to current, but my favourite music is from the 1980s as this was when I was growing up and it has some special significance to me. I make my own mixes on computer and have currently created seven album mixes.

I undertook a BTEC in IT for IT practitioners at college in 2005 and was awarded a distinction, so I am going to undertake a BTEC National Diploma Level 3 in IT for IT practitioners this year.

I would like a pen-pal to write to who lives in the local area, although I don't mind if you live further away! I would love to share my interests with people and hopefully gain some new friends to talk to!

I am an outgoing, shy, but friendly person who feels nervous about meeting people for the first time but I suppose that is the same for anybody!

Looking for foreign air force patches and anything else from foreign air forces. Any foreign country except the USA and Canada.

Also, can anyone help get backing for a model aircraft museum that I want to set up in York? Please get in touch if you have an interest in making model planes. I am a Dundee United fan.

Ian

Don't Dream of the Dead Clock

© Brian Scully 2006

I close my eyes, and the vastness that is night consumes me.
It envelopes my senses, sending me into emptiness,
until I feel nothing but thoughts.

The pictures come flooding in,
a vast array of colours, blurring — melting into my mind.
Consciousness fades slowly, I feel myself slipping away.

I sit at the table, there's a clock, ticking — but I can't tell the
time.

The room is small, a window and a bed.
A piece of white parchment, in which a signature is required,
And a quill, but no ink.

Visibility is sharp, but sadly the vagueness continues.
Images continue to flash rapidly before me,
Memories of a childhood I once spent.
How did I get here?
I don't recall.

A spatter of blood I see, etched into the parchment.
I raise my hand, and panic in a blind rage as my vision turns
red.
Suddenly it hits me.

The pain — the realisation.
The clock's significance and the feeling of an impending
doom.
The pain strikes again — sharpness to the head.

I see the sun, it creeps in the window,
and the shadows crawl from under the bed.
A drop of blood trickles from my eye,
I remember the tears that once fell and the guilt of the sins
that produced them.

Is this the ink of the devil?
It can't be I assure myself, I am too young.
This is too awful to contemplate.
It can't be my time.

Neither can have me, I scream,
A flash to the eyes — suddenly I am torn, ripped in two,
and the whirlwind that is reality strikes,
it was nothing but a dream.

Prisoner — M H Act, section 3

The truth being a whistle blower like me

S.O.S.
Save our sister
I cry
I don't deserve this one
Oh heavenly mother
Father our god our creators
Look down on me
Set my wondering
Spirit free

I'm tired and drawn
Is this like another
Scenario before dawn

A modern tale with
Ancient memories
'Tis it be my turn
to hang from a

Nail

Serec

Mainstream education — the best days of your life???

by Josh

I have been on this world for 17 years, but I feel I have only been alive for 18 months. Before that, I was just dreaming a hellish nightmare which I have come to call “Mainstream Education”.

At playgroup they had a large set of burgundy tubes, blue platforms, and red joining pieces which would be made into something that everyone could climb on. Everyone’s favourite was when it was made into a windmill. Now, I didn’t have any friends, and I didn’t really want any. I just wanted to go on the windmill. I would wait for everyone to get off. And then I would get on, and turn the handle and count the number of times one of the sails went past the top.

Sometimes I had to settle for looking at the windmill because it was so popular. In my head, I would try and work out more interesting configurations. But the teachers would always put me back with the other kids. But as soon as they weren’t looking I would go back and watch again.

When I started primary school I was given a “buddy” — to help me make friends. This didn’t work. Instead I had the pleasure of being the butt of jokes. I was always “it” as they knew that I was not fast enough to catch them. The best time was summer, because then it was too hot to play “it”. And so we would get sticks, and start digging under the fence, in the shade of trees. I would always get put on some very hard and rooty spot, but at least I wasn’t being bullied. This would last a few days before the teachers found out what we were doing and stopped us. Then the bullying would start again.

How did I deal with the bullying? Well, firstly, chocolate is very comforting, so at home I ate lots. I also found that it helped to cry to sleep sometimes, as after crying, you are

naturally tired. At school, I always wore a jumper, as it made me feel safer. At break times I would wear my coat. It was black, thick, and had a big fluffy hood. I would do it up fully as I felt much safer and walk around the lines of the playground. It is not as boring as you might think. There were courts for football, tennis, hockey, basketball, and many others. So I would always have a different route, as where the lines intersected, I could change direction. However there were usually people playing, so I just settled for walking on the outside lines, and getting hit by stray balls.

Primary school ended, and then I entered a place which means that I no longer fear eternal damnation in hell — secondary school. My school is known as one of the best in Surrey, but I was bullied more than ever. There were also bullying teachers. I was dumped in some lower sets with a lot of troublemakers, and so the teacher just bullied everyone in a futile attempt to keep control.

Someone was given a detention for being about four seconds late after the bell. I thought this was unreasonable, as the school is huge and you only had five minutes to get from one class to another. So I became terrified of being late. I also saw someone get a detention for forgetting one of his books; he had brought geography instead of French. So I started to carry all the books for all the subjects in my bag. I wouldn’t even use a locker partly because I might forget to change it over, or because I got trampled by the crowds. I was 12 and was carrying four stone in books on my back. My first bag broke after half a day, the second was a heavy duty hiking bag and lasted a few years.

I had a complete breakdown in Year Ten. Attempts were made to re-integrate me, but in January 2005, I was permanently signed off school by my psychologist. That’s when I woke from the nightmare and started living.

Eleven years of bullying, several betrayals from so-called “best friends”, eighty or more self-inflicted scars, abuse of tobacco, alcohol and several different illegal narcotics including cocaine, ecstasy and LSD, three separate mental health conditions, seven months’ worth of time spent in and out of an acute mental health unit, over thirty failed girlfriends, twelve sexual partners, three failed suicide attempts, involvement in the occult and Satanism, a criminal past including offences such as conspiracy to murder, fraud, arson, GBH, theft and more, and a failed education ... guess how old I am?

Hi, my name is Sam, and I am eighteen years old. My first involvement with the psychiatric services was when I was ten years of age. I remember my mother’s words. “There’s nothing wrong with Samuel, it’s the ones that are bullying that have something wrong with them.” I left that psychiatrist’s office as confused and depressed as before. It wasn’t until four years later that I would return to see him, as devastatingly lost as ever.

“Samuel has a condition known as Asperger’s Syndrome.” Of all the reasons for my pain that I had contrived in my head — the next step in evolution, a psychopath, a psychic, this was something I had never heard of. Sometimes I still wish it was more than AS, perhaps in an effort to explain the pain and torment. But when you come to realize that AS truly is the correct diagnosis, you start to appreciate just how debilitating this condition really is.

It makes me feel like a puppet. A lost soul comprised of a memetic legacy passed down from the first autistic being. A Frankenstein’s monster, made up of the parts and memories of things I have read, heard and witnessed. I don’t feel like a real person. I just feel like a carrier for a disease.

I often wonder when I look up at the sky at night, “Are there others looking up at the same

sky, thinking the same thoughts?” I feel so lonely, so isolated. I feel like a child inside, trapped in a cave, on his knees wishing for the light.

I wander the streets dressed in black, wearing nail varnish and make-up; you’re a stereotypical goth and people walking past mock me. But they don’t realize that I’m not just different on the outside. I’m different on the inside too. I’m a Satanist, a Nietzschean ... I have Asperger’s Syndrome.

But I know that there is a way out. There is a promised land for us all. One day we might find it. One of us has to.

Going home
Where’s that?
Shadows falling across the path
The world is fading into darkness
Deep sigh
My cuts are bleeding
Quiet
I’m wasting everything
Too late
Too late
Too late

Maria

Aspie in the house

Working at the National Autistic Society

by Paul Wady

Sometimes I find myself the first into Reception, when I let people in and generally start up the building. This is followed by either waiting for the mail to come, or taking it down to be processed for the next hour or so.

So begins a day. I do a few other things in that time too, but mainly the morning must be spent doing the above, whilst simultaneously organising the basement meeting rooms. It's a lovely quiet space then, as the staff enter and fill it up, and usually we have people using the meeting rooms. This employs my Aspie Blag, my capacity to score points by relating. It is of course an act, but one reason I got the job was my capacity to look Neurotypical and Nice all the time. I see it as first nature as it was how I was brought up, but nowadays I know it's not really me to relate and be respectful and "nice" all the time.

At one point during the day I tour the building, making sure a number of things are okay. This is the point of greatest danger since it usually means my energy is up, and I could say things that I feel like rather than "doing the act". The workforce are very sympathetic though, and I don't have the same ego-relationship with making the right impression I used to. Thankfully, I seem to have aged enough to physically slow down, so the hyper-levels of energy have gone. This allows more harmonising and relating in the office environment, where everyone is sitting and NT.

I have slowly learned the names of people in their different departments, and once it's sunk in — it stays. I have a grasp of the building as a whole which develops more and more, which is the goal. That is, where everything is and what is wanted on each floor, such as photocopy paper, toner, coffee and sugar and the location of individuals to deliver boxes to.

It's taken a lot of months to settle in, but I now feel quite at home here, and enjoy the variations and routines equally. I have opportunities to meet other Aspies, as well as represent our kind to the charity as best as I am able. Keeps me fit, too.

The National Autistic Society (NAS) does its best for us, whilst operating within certain constraints as a charity. Its helplines and advocates (who are volunteers) do what they can, whilst being a lot more aware of how our lives are than you'd think. Ultimately, I've learned that the NAS can only go "so far", and give so much. Beyond that, it's up to our kind to come together as a community, and watch ourselves.

The NAS is very much behind such empowerment, but can only help so far. I hope that with my presence in the NAS I am demonstrating that we can function in the workplace, and still be seen as who and what we are.

Hello there,

My name is Cheryl. I am 20 years old, and I was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome when I was about 11 years old. I used to go to a school for people with a variety of special needs. Then, when I was 11 years old, I finally got a residential place at Thornhill Park School in Sunderland, North-East England. This is an autism-specific school, which has done wonders for me. If you're a parent of somebody with autism-spectrum disorders, or if you're autistic yourself, I recommend this school with almost exhortation, as the staff there are very understanding of the condition we have. Now I am residential at ESPA Colleges, Sunderland, which is also extremely good.

Of course I have written to *Asperger United* for a reason; all things have a reason. Along with a wide variety of other interests, such as biology, the English language, I am interested in religion. I am a born-again (not to be confused with reincarnation) Christian, and have been for about three-and-a-half years now. God (the God of the Bible) has really helped me with self-esteem — a thing that can really affect people with Asperger syndrome in a bad way, especially if they have been rejected by their parents, peers or professionals.

God has really helped me a lot in life and I certainly feel he has a purpose for me. For example, my mother has always done the best for me educationally and has put up with a lot. She has been more faithful to me than words could say. And when she couldn't do something, my older sister was always there to help and provide. In hindsight, I can see how God has provided for me and has protected me.

Something I've personally found very inspiring and helpful in my life is the discovery of a daily devotional called *The Word For Today (TWFT)*. There is a short reading for every day and each booklet lasts for three months, and, consequently, there is a booklet for

every season. It has some really useful tips in it. Even if you're not very religious, some of the daily readings are more practical than spiritual, eg. they talk about how to treat others, etc. — it's definitely worth a try and it's FREE.

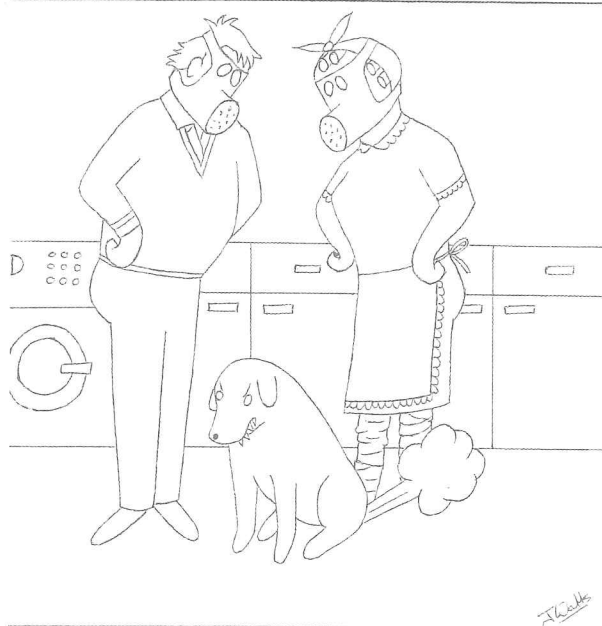
To subscribe to *TWFT* log on to:

www.ucb.co.uk/biblehelps

Once you are on the site there are sections headed with turquoise labels. If you look at the section entitled Sign Up for a copy. You will notice that you can sign up for either *TWFT* or *TW4U2D* (this is the youth edition of *TWFT*). Once you've clicked on the one you want, just fill in your address and they'll send you a copy. If you have any questions about God or you just want to contact me, please do so via *AU*.

Note: UCB stands for "United Christian Broadcasters".

GIVE A DOG A BAD NAME



AND IT WILL SULK FOR A WEEK

A cat is not a broken dog — successful with autism!

by Ametrine

How often is autism described as a tragedy these days, especially in the wake of all the MMR controversy? How many autistic children will have to suffer the poisoning of chelation, and other destructive therapies . . . before recognition comes that autism is not a disease, not a warp of character, but a different and valid way of being?

Just as cats are not defective versions of dogs, so autistics are not defective versions of the accepted norm. We share our outer appearance and physiology with non-autistics, but our needs and desires, our sufferings and happinesses, may be very different. And equally valid.

My life has had many ups and downs, many stages, just like most people's. There was school . . . high school . . . adolescence . . . early adulthood . . . and now I'm 32 years old and have had an actually happy life for about two years.

I spent my twenties in and out of psychiatric institutions, acquiring a diagnosis of "personality disorder (unspecified)". For years I said, actually I think I'm autistic. And for years I was told that my obsession with autism was part of my (unspecified!) personality disorder. At 30 years old I found someone who was able to diagnose me as on the autistic spectrum. Through this I found validation for all those unusual experiences in my life which up until then had been formally put down to childhood sexual abuses (which never happened).

(I have to note here that when I recently challenged the diagnosis of "personality disorder (unspecified)", saying it isn't even a valid diagnostic label . . . I was told (in writing) that they gave me it so that if my presentation changed in the future they wouldn't have to change my diagnosis! So . . . next time you go

to A&E with a broken finger and get a diagnosis of "broken bone (unspecified)", be glad that if you break your leg (or your neck!) in the future your diagnosis can remain the same. Yup, unhelpful, and wouldn't happen.)

In my late twenties I lived in various supported housing schemes. Each placement started very successfully and ended in bad feeling all round, failure. I was bullied first by other residents and later by support staff and managers (who misunderstood my needs and judged certain stress behaviours as deliberate, thanks to the personality disorder diagnosis).

My last supported housing placement failed badly due to a noisy neighbour. The building was badly designed (although purpose-built) with no soundproofing whatsoever. And then a hypersensitive but undiagnosed autistic was placed there! This placement resulted in a very serious attempt at taking my life, as I felt that there was nowhere I could go to escape noise or bullying and still get the support I needed.

And then . . . I became a Buddhist. I found out that Buddhist communities do not permit TV, music or other disturbing noise: I had come home! I moved into a small Buddhist community of up to seven residents, in a city where I had lived previously.

It is more than the quiet that draws me to Buddhism. I benefit hugely from a different understanding of human behaviour and life in general, from meditation and prayer, and also from acceptance within the wider community of my Buddhist tradition.

After sixteen months I moved out from the Buddhist community, to live in a flat on my own (with my budgie). I'm now living in a small village not far from one of our larger Buddhist centres. Here I can live a quiet life,

mostly on my own. Each day I go to the Buddhist centre for prayers and teachings. At home I study the teachings and do my own prayers and meditations.

I plan to do four half-days of voluntary work each week, two at the Buddhist centre and two in the nearby town at a charity shop, and remain on disability benefits. I'm also planning to get into speaking about my life experiences as an autistic, at relevant events. A few weeks ago I was a guest speaker at a conference in Oregon, USA, on *Autism and Spirituality*.

My ultimate wish for the future is to be ordained as a Buddhist nun.

My point in writing this essay is that I am living a good life that suits me. I am unable to work enough hours to earn a living, yet I can still put something back in various different ways — currently writing like this, voluntary work, speaking about my experiences and some local work in helping to develop autism services and autism awareness generally.

I've found a way to become a fully functional cat rather than seeing myself, and being perceived by others, as a defective dog.

All you cat-people out there: take heart! There is a place for you somewhere where you can find your happiness. You need to get to know your own needs, limitations and abilities and then work out how to live within them; where you need support and where to challenge yourself. Do not let society turn you into, or keep you as, a broken dog.

I want to finish with a note for those who will be saying, but my son/daughter is not as high-functioning as you are To all of you: I was semi-verbal until 23 years old. My sensory processing is inconsistent, yet I've learnt to function from within the chaos. Don't write people off because their difficulties look extreme. Cats cannot be effective dogs, but they can be happy felines.

My work at Broxtowe College near Long Eaton, Nottingham

My name is Richard and I work at Broxtowe College during the day supporting adults with learning difficulties. Of more direct relevance to readers of this magazine is that I work at an after-college social club just for young adults with Asperger Syndrome.

The club I work at is on the college site and allows young people with Asperger's to mix together socially.

This college has a most progressive ethos which is why I myself, with Asperger's, have been employed as a paid support worker, alongside two others, at this activity. I am aware that there are other social clubs of this nature, but none to my knowledge that directly employ people with AS to support the club.

There seems to be far more provision for people with Asperger's in the region of Leicester, Derby and Nottingham.

I challenge my own condition and hope that other people with Asperger's can also look to being employed working with others with a disability.

Anyone wanting more information about this club should contact Broxtowe College.

Hi, my name is Domonic, I am 17 years old and go to college learning life skills. I have Asperger's and was diagnosed when I was six. I live in Dunstable. My interests are collecting yu-gi-oh cards and Harry Potter. I like space, dinosaurs and Egypt. I also watch Transformers and Power Rangers and collect the toys. I don't go anywhere on my own at the moment, as I am nervous of roads. I am a member of the wanted art club run by Autism Bedfordshire, and we meet twice a month. I would like to hear from anyone with similar interests. Hope to hear from you soon.

Experiences of individuals with ASC from minority ethnic communities

The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities' project at the National Autistic Society wants to print a booklet about the experiences of people on the autism spectrum who belong to a minority ethnic community. This booklet will aim to capture the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of the people from minority ethnic communities in and around London.

The experiences that are printed in the booklet will hopefully help others with autism-spectrum conditions (ASC) to feel that they are not alone. It will also be useful to highlight the issues faced by people with ASC amongst professionals and service providers.

We need people to come forward who are willing to share their experiences. You can choose whether you would like to be interviewed, or if you would like to write answers to our questions and send them to us.

If you are willing to be interviewed, the interview will take approximately one hour. We

will tape your interview and then write it up. A time and place for the interview will be agreed with the person.

If you don't want your real names to be known, we can change your names in the publication.

If you belong to a minority ethnic community in London and would like to talk to us, please contact Prithvi Perepa on

020 7704 3806

or email **prithvi.perepa@nas.org.uk**

Prithvi Perepa is the Development Officer for the BME communities project at the National Autistic Society. It is a London-based project. The project aims to raise awareness about the issues faced by people belonging to minority ethnic communities, and to make service providers sensitive to their needs. The project is also working on creating awareness about autism-spectrum conditions within different ethnic communities.

The Asperger social guide

by Genevieve Edmonds and Dean Worton
Paul Chapman Publishing, £15.99, ISBN: 1 4129 2024 8
reviewed by **the Goth**

A companion to the *Asperger love guide*, this book offers explanations and tips in a similar format. Sadly it is marred both by a number of jarring Americanisms and grammatical errors which give the impression that it has been

prepared for print rather carelessly or quickly. Nevertheless, I feel that readers who have already begun to grasp the basics of social interaction could learn a lot from this book.



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