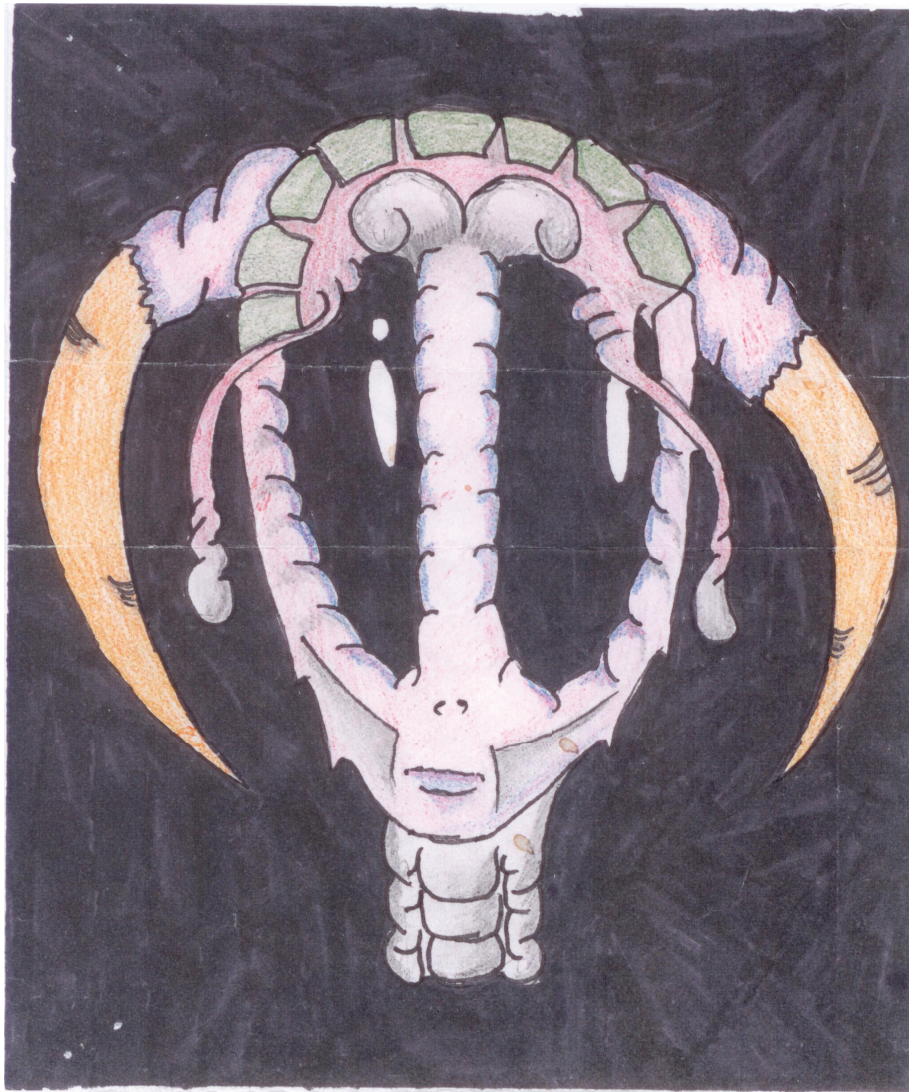


Produced by and for autistic people

Asperger *United*

Edition 86 April 2016



Asperger United

Asperger United is a magazine run by and for autistic adults (although some parents subscribe on behalf of their under-sixteens). The magazine aims to put people who have the condition in touch with each other and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

Please note that *AU* receives over 200 letters each quarter so it is not possible to respond to every one, nor for every contribution to be printed. Discussions on editorial choices will not be entered into. *AU* protects the identity of contributors by not printing full names unless the writer asks for his or her full name to be used.

Asperger United is free. To subscribe you, we need your postal address. We ask for a contribution of £9 per year from overseas readers and £15 from professionals and institutions to cover postage costs. Please make cheques payable to the NAS. Organisations requiring multiple copies: no extra fee, please get in touch.

Editor: the Goth

National Autistic Society production support: the Publications Team

NAS phone support: the Supporter Care Team

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, John Joyce and the current editor, the Goth (who does not wear black).

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 Kaczynski, formerly Cohen.

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:

Email: asp.utd@nas.org.uk

Asperger United
c/o The National Autistic Society
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG

Tel: **0808 800 1050** (free from most landlines) or
Tel: **020 7923 5779** (geographical charges apply)

All we need is your name and address and we will add you to the mailing list — free of charge.

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 magazine.

Asperger United is available in **large print** on A3 sheets (double the size of this page). If you need large print, please let us know using the email address or postal address above.

Contributions for the next issue should reach *AU* by **9 May 2016**

Welcome to the April edition of *Asperger United*.

I was delighted, if a little stressed, by the biggest postbag ever. Sorry to all those still waiting for a response, some of you waited patiently for eight weeks. The wait should be back to its usual two weeks now — until the April postbag!

Sorry also to anyone distressed by anything I published last time (or any other time, come to that). I never set out to be controversial, but I do think that it's important that lots of different views are printed, otherwise you won't know if

anyone else shares your views. Learning that we are not alone is one of the main benefits of *AU*, as far as I can tell from your letters.

I hope you continue to find value in the pieces I choose for publication: if not, let me know.

Lastly, there is more by Matthew Price in this issue. Normally I avoid printing more than one piece per person, but book reviews are popular, and it's his first art, so I've made an exception,

the Editor

the acceptance edition — suggestions for next issue on page 5

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Acceptance

by **Deanne**, new *Asperger United* reader

Acceptance is love.

“Love does not alter, when alteration finds.”

I don’t know who wrote this. Perhaps a reader with a relative old enough will know. I only know it to be true.

If you love someone, you will accept them warts and all.

This does not mean that they won’t be annoying, frustratingly stubborn, awkward and at times embarrassing, but, if you love them, you will accept them, knowing that these are not their only qualities.

Sons and daughters with AS/autism do not just appear, they are born of the “gene pool” of their parents and ancestors, and just as you would be able to see at different stages of a child’s life a look of a certain relative or a mannerism of one of the parents, AS/autism presents itself too.

Unlike the other disabilities which are visually identified immediately, AS/autism can gradually reveal itself over time.

We look normal, so it’s a double-edged sword.

The neurotypicals only accept their normal, but to us we are normal.

Looking back at my lot, we were laced with AS/autism and are all different in character and personalities, some with great strengths and obvious weaknesses.

A few have had to resort to antidepressants during their lives and have had to spend short spells in mental-health hospitals to be able to cope and be accepted again, yet earlier they have shone in their work and professional

careers, being both talented and creative, and always appeared to give 100% in achieving their ambitions and goals.

We must all value and try to at least understand our families and remember “charity begins at home”.

It is only then we can open our hearts to have the compassion and insight to accept each other.

Neurotypical/AS/autism and whatever else! The list goes on and on.

Acceptance is love.

PS. Can I also add that if you are one of the unlucky few who really believes that no one accepts you: do not completely despair, the animal kingdom is a lot more embracing and therapeutic to be with.

Which is why, over the years, our family (who have not always been accepting of one another, even though they were of the same flesh and blood) have always included animals to be part of our family.

You love them – they love you. No arguments – no grudges. As long as you are able to feed, water, and clean up after.

A large German shepherd is as loyal and loving a friend as you will ever need in this life.

(Or one of the mini versions of any breed, for that matter. Cat, dog, rabbit, hamster, and so on.)

I cannot remember in my 63 years ever not having a German shepherd in the house.

We all seemed to know the value of an added friend who is genuine and reliable.

a letter and an article in response to Matthew and David

Hello fellow questioners,

I refer to the letter from Matthew Price on page 14 in the January edition of *Asperger United*. Matthew asks a lot of questions. Yes, I suspect that each individual with autism does the same.

Matthew asks if it was his fault that his parents split up? No is the absolute answer to that question. The simple fact that Matthew was five or six years old at the time of the split means that zero fault can be apportioned to Matthew.

Matthew raises the subject of hurt feelings. I know, historically, that I have hurt the feelings of others because my mother has told me so but I was totally oblivious to it. I was not diagnosed with AS then but since my diagnosis I have told people with whom I come into contact with that I have AS and as a result my way of being does not follow social norms. I am certain that being up front with people is better than forcing them to make up their own narrative.

I can read but I do not read, with one exception, namely, *Asperger United*. *AU* alerts you to the fact that we are different from the norm but also to the fact that we are different to one another. *Asperger United* gives you insight as to how individuals with autism live their lives.

I appreciate that Matthew wants more insight. That may be a bottomless pit? We are what we are and I believe that we are best placed when we make no secret of how we are and how we will be.

Michael

Reply to David's article,

An essay on being alone,

which was in issue 85 – January 2016

by Nigel

I am a 45-year-old Aspie male with two marriages done and dusted, and I think I am just about qualified to help David.

He mentions that when the ladies find out about his Asperger's then they don't want to know. After my second marriage ended I went on a dating site and yes, most were not interested when I mentioned me being Aspie. Well, then they're not the ones for me so I am glad I told them. I persevered and have now met someone who is incredibly warm-hearted and accepting of my Aspie side. In fact, she embraces it. I wouldn't have found her if I hadn't persevered.

If he wishes to be treated "normally" then he will need to find someone who is equally accepting, but know this: him being Aspie is a positive not a negative so there definitely will be someone there for you.

As for the feeling of loneliness, I practise a religion that enables us to manifest happiness from inside, so I would encourage David to fill the void with David, then do the dating thing. I honestly feel that's how I feel such much happier since my diagnosis back in August 2013.

Please feel free to pass on my details to David if he wishes to contact. I know how busy you are so maybe that won't be doable, but in any case I thank you very much for your hard working in producing this amazing magazine.

If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for July will be **sensory differences** or **misunderstanding** (this could be your misunderstanding of others or others' misunderstanding of you). Vote with your contributions: the more submissions on a subject sent in (from different people), the more likely that that subject will be the theme. Writing on any subject is still welcome, as are ideas for new themes, and artwork. Remember, if you want to see different content in *AU*, the best way to change it is to send something in!

Choosing autism interventions

A research-based guide

by **Bernard Fleming, Elisabeth Hurley
and the Goth**

Pavilion

ISBN: 978 1 91036 676 9 £19.95

review by **Helen**

This book needs to become the go-to guide for professionals when thinking about interventions!

The opening section, *Key information*, is highly informative and wonderfully written, taking the time to properly break down the different areas that people need to know about before moving on to the main point of the guide, the interventions.

The sheer breadth of the interventions covered in this publication is astounding; with each one fully looked-at, assessing the evidence available as well as the risks, costs and time requirements. In essence this guide offers a truly unbiased overview of what is currently available, supplying an impressive amount of references and citations to allow the reader to engage in further research should they wish. The language used in the overviews of the individual interventions is suitable for both professionals and non, with explanations provided for the more complex terminology but without ever crossing the line into “dumbing down” territory. Some of the intervention chapters do carry some heavy medical terms but a no point does it feel as if the reader has begun to read a textbook or needs a science qualification to proceed!

On a personal note the layout of the guide is one I love: easy-to-read type and size, clearly laid out and a wonderfully refreshing approach to colour schemes! Being able to pick it up and go straight to the introduction or appendices based on the colour of the pages is a simple thing that adds a level of delight when using this guide.

Autistic Pride Day 2016

by **Joseph**

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you all to the Autistic Pride Picnic in the Park, 2016. We will meet up beside the Marble Arch on 19 June 2016 at 13:00 and make our way into Hyde Park near Speakers’ Corner. (Marble Arch stands in a public square.)

Autistic Pride Day was created in 2005 by members of the online forum *Aspies for Freedom*. It is normally held on or around 18 June of every year. There were a few offline meetups in the early years, but the tradition fizzled out at the beginning of this decade. In 2015 it was revived again, with Autistic Pride events taking place in London, Reading and Inverness. We hope to create something even bigger for 2016.

The purpose of this event is to show to the world that we are proud of being on the autistic spectrum, we’re not diseased or defective people who need curing and we have just as much right to live a happy and fulfilling life as neurotypicals do.

For the rest of the year, many of us have to suppress and feel ashamed of our autistic traits. But for this day, we can cast this shame aside and be our awesome selves. This event deliberately takes inspiration from the Gay Pride events.

Basically we will have a picnic, and may stage a public performing-arts show. Brave people can speak at Speakers’ Corner if they choose to. If you just want to be here but don’t want to participate that’s okay too. Bring along things related to your special interests as well.

Pen pals

Pen pal number 215

Hi, my name is Jack. I am 24 years old and live near Liverpool. I was diagnosed with autism when I was 14 years old.

I love watching films, listening to lots of different types of music (especially classic rock) and playing guitar. I have a passion for animals.

I would like to hear from anyone who is kind, easy going with a good sense of humour. Thank you for reading this.

Pen pal number 216

Hi. My name is Sue. I'd like to hear from others in the Cambridge area with mild Asperger's or close to the autistic spectrum.

I first came to Cambridge as a student and then worked for some time in a wholefood business which was run as a workers' cooperative.

I'm now living in a nursing home as I suffer from severe ME with severe food intolerance plus severe sensitivity to noise, chemicals and electricity.

When well enough I like to read, listen to music or get into the garden for fresh air.

Current interests include health, autism and Asperger's, as well as science, spirituality and possible links between the two.

I hope to hear from you soon.

How to place a pen-pal advert

- All you need to do is send your advert along with your name and address (and email address if you want) to *Asperger United*. You can use the Royal Mail or email. The next pen-pal number will be given to your advert when it arrives.
- Please note that *AU* does not print dating adverts, as it is unable to provide suitable support.
- Those under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen-pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.
- If you get no replies, please don't take this personally.

How to reply to pen pals

- Please remember to let us know the name and number of the person whom your letter is for. (All pen pals are numbered by the editor, not the person who sends in the advert.)
- Please remember to put your address on your letter.
- To contact a pen pal, please send your letter to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG, or email asp.utd@nas.org.uk
- 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.

****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.

Twenty-five pen-pal adverts have been held over for publication in the next six issues, Editor.

Pen pal number 217

Dear pen pal,

my name is John. I am 23 years old. I like Harry Potter. My favourite is Bellatrix. I like to watch *Total drama island*. I like to write fan fiction about *Family guy*, *Adventure time*, *Star wars*, Harry Potter, Mario brothers and Snoopy.

Hope to hear from you soon.

Pen pal number 218

Hello my name is Jack. I am 20 years old and I live in Gloucestershire. I finished a computing course in college and am doing art and design.

My interests include PlayStation games such as *Mortal kombat* and *Borderlands*, also Nintendo games such as Pokémon and *Splatoon*.

I am also interested in animals: I completed an animal care course. I love reptiles and dogs; I absolutely love my black Labrador, Tyke.

Pen pal number 219

Hi, my name is Hannah. I have Asperger's syndrome and I am interested in science, outer space, synaesthesia, microscopes, lucid dreaming and Buddhism. I'm 22 but I'm naturally child-like in my ways; I like playing games, I'm innocent-minded, I laugh at everything and I derive joy from simple things.

I love animals, nature and the night. As well as Asperger's, I have prosopagnosia (face-blindness). I would like to hear from anyone who thinks they can relate to me.

Pen pal number 220

Hey my name is Adeinne, I'm 24 years old from Glasgow. Hopefully some people that are reading this have similar interests to myself.

My interests are watching TV shows such as *Dance moms*, *One born every minute*, *The Paul O'Grady show*, WWE, documentaries, *Britain's got talent* and more which would take me forever to mention.

I'm also a huge *Simpsons* fan and watch it most days either on TV or DVD but I watch *Family guy* and *American dad* too.

I also like going to the theatre where I have seen lots of wonderful shows such as *Shrek*, *Barnum*, *The sound of music* and *Hairspray*. Another thing I enjoy is going to the cinema most recently I went to see the new *Cinderella*.

I enjoy reading *The Broons*, *Oor Wullie*, *The Guinness book of records* and WWE books.

I love animals and have a chocolate Labrador: my favourite animal is either dogs, penguins or foxes. I am scared of bugs and insects. I've also been very lucky to swim with dolphins.

I enjoy baking cakes and cooking things such as lasagna or spaghetti bolognese.

I have a huge collection of fridge magnets which I've picked up from different places that I have visited.

I really enjoy playing video games on my PC, Playstation, 3DS and Wii u, such as *Sims 4*, *Mario Kart 8* and *Super Mario bros*.

I am mad on anything to do with Disneyworld although not rollercoasters as I suffer from motion sickness.

Thank you for taking the time to read my advert.

Beautiful creatures

Book one of four in the
Beautiful creatures series
by **Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl**

Penguin

ISBN: 978 0 14132 608 5

£7.99 / \$19.95

review by **Matthew Price**

I felt compelled to read this book after seeing the film (and that was great!).

I was just as impressed with the book.

It has eccentric characters who are memorable and draw you into their captivating world.

I finished the book within a day and have already started and nearly finished book 2, *Beautiful darkness*.

The way these two authors amalgamate their work and characters is exceptional.

I was connected in many ways to both the main characters, Lena and Ethan.

The story is truly amazing and a work of art! It helped to see the film beforehand cos you can clearly see the setting!

I recommend this book to all!

This book and the one on page 6 are available from all good bookshops and through Amazon's charitable scheme at

www.autism.org.uk/amazon

and if you use this address instead of the usual Amazon one, the NAS gets a donation from Amazon.

Aut-Haslemere

notice by **Laura**

Aut-Haslemere is a new support group in Haslemere, run by and for autistic adults aged 18+. We meet monthly to discuss various topics, and share successes, strategies, hints and tips, and the opportunity to make new friends. You do not need a formal diagnosis to attend.

Meetings

We meet on the first Monday of the month, 6-8pm, within 10 minutes' walk from the high street and train station.

The next meetings are:

- 7 March *Introduction to the group*, establishing the group rules
- 4 April *Building fulfilling lives*: work, education, hobbies: challenges and strategies
- 2 May *Building friendships and relationships*: challenges and strategies

Contact me for further information.

Email: **laura@autangel.org.uk**

Call or text: **07793 766 494**

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/authaslemere/>

Mail (correspondence only):

Aut-Haslemere
3 Fieldway
Haslemere
Surrey
GU27 2AU

letters to the Editor

Dear AU,

I have always felt different to my peers: throughout my life I appear to be the butt of the joke. The worst thing is not knowing, when I say something, if people are laughing with me or at me.

I tend to isolate myself a lot: I panic if I have to go to any social events, as it means I must mingle, not many people enjoy my interests. A few call me sad because I know so much about my interests or hobbies.

I had a pre-diagnosis and was told to get an official diagnosis of which I am still waiting two years on.

It is nice to know that I am not alone in this world, others have similar issues.

Regards,

Steve

I'm glad it helps to feel less alone, to know that others have had the same experiences. I often publish things that I know some will find upsetting, knowing that others will be helped. I hope everyone can be understanding, Editor.

Dear Goth,

I discovered I was probably Aspie after a friend of mine was diagnosed. I scoured the Aspie websites and books for his benefit, then realised that I had it too!

The fact that he “infected me with his Aspies” has been a source of humour for both of us. I am good at writing stories and ended up creating a character (loosely based on him) who took on a life of his own . . . in the stories we tackled various Aspie issues and made each other laugh.

I'm getting sidetracked . . .

I am emailing you regarding the article “Thoughts on Aspie Burnout” by Colin.

I think he has a very valid point! I have suffered from “burnout” on more than one occasion. I've even walked out of jobs because I simply couldn't do them anymore. I couldn't really explain to anyone why!!!

I didn't know I was Aspie at the time, so I was confused and bewildered by the fact that I simply couldn't go to work anymore. It was assumed that I had depression/anxiety. I was put on medication and sent for CBT.

I wasn't ill, I simply couldn't continue with what I was doing as I hadn't got the resources to do it. The Aspie diagnosis has been very liberating and relieved my sense of inadequacy at being unable to do what “normal” people do. The depression and anxiety were symptoms of the stress of trying to manage for all these years.

After a period of recovery it is possible to work again, however the existing system doesn't allow for this. It's a case of waiting to be eligible for benefits, or having to find a new job while in a state of burnout. Having bills to pay that don't stop coming in just because I am off work adds to the stress. I have always lived on a low wage, simply because I haven't got the resources to work a lot of hours around other people or in acute situations. Any savings I have had have been used up covering periods when I haven't been able to work. This is not something that neurotypical people would understand as they see me as cheerful, friendly and reasonably outgoing.

I heartily support any kind of campaign to allow for Aspies to be able to get the help that they need.

It's reassuring to read about other Aspies and relate to their experiences, but as a woman I don't share a fascination for computers, Doctor Who or sci-fi. (Although Seven of Nine from *Star trek voyager* is an inspiring character),

Heidi

PS. Do other Aspies like peanut butter and marmite (together) on a sandwich? Is it an Aspie thing?

Dear Goth,

thank you for publishing *Nutter's syndrome* in the January edition and thank you to Lisa for writing it. It perfectly captured what we experience in our family, which has someone diagnosed with autism-spectrum "disorder" and others self-diagnosed as on the autistic spectrum. It should be required reading for everyone. I hope Lisa will approach other publications or will blog about it to help increase everyone's awareness. In all seriousness, I hope that one day there will be support groups (or at least more training) for NTs to help them integrate better with ASs.

Thanks for a refreshing read.

Anne

Dear Editor,

in reply to James' letter about not liking to wear trousers due to discomfort in covering his legs, may I suggest he considers wearing a kilt?

You do not need to be Scottish to wear a kilt; you can get lightweight kilts (for warmer weather) and heavier ones. You can wear whatever you like with them — shirt, rugby shirt or jacket.

There are hundreds of tartans to choose from: you are not restricted to your own "clan". Many organisations and cities have their own tartan, and sports' clubs too.

You do not need to be a "true Scotsman" and if you wear a sporran it is less likely to be picked than if you carry a wallet in a back trouser pocket.

It's also an ideal ice-breaker if you are uncertain of making the first move at a party.

Midge

Neurological discrimination

found on the Internet by Richard
(similar to Wikipedia, but not the
same piece)

Neurological discrimination is giving low social status to someone not conforming to the neurotype. This can be assuming very able, undisgnosed people are disabled if they do not desire to (or are unable to) conform to convention. This is a controversial concept, most prominent in the case of high-functioning autism, where direct cognitive benefits appear to come at the expense of social intelligence.

Discrimination may also extend to other high-functioning individuals, such as those with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and bipolar-spectrum disorders. In these cases, socially disadvantageous cognitive traits are directly correlated with advantageous cognitive traits in other domains, notably creativity and divergent thinking, and yet these strengths might be systematically overlooked. The case for neurological discrimination lies in the expectation that one's professional capacity may be judged by the quality of one's social interaction, which can be an inaccurate and discriminatory measure.

When my best friend Keith died, being a poet I sat down and wrote a poem about him. But I read it through and realized it was corny rubbish, so I concluded the poem was not meant to be. A few days later I just felt like writing something, anything, and a few lines in I suddenly realized "this is about Keith." Looking back, I find it curious I never wrote the word "death" — I never saw it. For me, this is a poem of love, of pain, and of denial.

Cliff

Broken-down friends

Friends are

two letters in response to A

In response to A's letter in the last edition of your magazine, I feel she is suffering from post-traumatic stress. The way she lumps all men together is no different to someone who treats all dogs as threatening, things to be feared.

Stress overwhelms you and makes it more difficult to think clearly, including the effect that stressed people show more “black-and-white” thinking. A good example of black-and-white thinking is when someone suffering from trauma generalises from some instances to a whole group. For example, generalising from several abusive men to thinking all men are abusive. I do this myself, even though I know it's wrong — it's habitual and very hard to get past. Even the most timid and friendly men can terrify me. I'm glad to see these issues raised in *AU*, even though it must have been traumatic for both Joe and A to see each other's pieces published.

Jack

Hello.

As a reader of *Asperger United*, I feel the time has come for me to become a contributor, at the very least. So here is my response to A.

I've read this magazine for a few years now, and in this issue, I saw something that put me on edge. It was A's re-write of Joe's article, from the July 2015 issue. It doesn't read like an insightful piece of storytelling on social situations. It looks entirely like it was meant to bash men, not just men with autism or Asperger's syndrome, but all men. Now, as both, a man, and a person with Asperger's, I can't say I'm all too pleased to see it, but I'm here to add my opinions to the pot.

So firstly, Joe noticing that Alice seemed shy. And the near-reprimand Bob got for his compliment over Alice's appearance. The re-write makes it look as if Alice was completely unaware of the situation she was getting into (something which I doubt, cause it's very rare for someone to go into a situation that might be risky). It says

nothing about her somewhat snappish attitude, which for many (including myself) would be a pretty good reason to walk out. After all, if you can't take a compliment, how on earth can you swallow critique? To make it sound like an “appraisal” of Alice is just speculation.

Secondly, there is nothing in the original article about the pair both choosing to be boyfriend and girlfriend. So we can throw out the idea that the pair were formally dating.

Sharing personal matters is an intimate thing: for them both to have done such suggests that their friendship was most certainly mutual, at least up until the point it ended suddenly. Alice has the right to feel uncomfortable, but for her to end a friendship so suddenly (she could've asked to be just friends) and then inform his other friends that he had lost interest in meeting up is not a good move to leave things on a good note.

Nowhere in what was written did it seem like Joe lashed out. He simply insisted they not contact one another again, and rightfully so. I suspect many, men and women, AS or NT, would've done the same in such a situation. Just like Alice has a right to feel uncomfortable, Joe has the right to feel upset at the situation, especially since Alice was willing to act behind his back and try to cancel his attendance to a picnic.

The idea that Joe had to “make up a story” in order to “punish Alice”, when she was the one that was seemingly acting to ruin the friendships that Joe had, is ridiculous.

Next, the situation with John and Belle. A pub meet. Simple enough. Calling on moral support, that's fine. John said he'd bring a friend. She said she'd bring her mother and a few products. No-where at the time, at least to them, did it seem like Belle would bring along a large number of people and try to sell things. After all, it's not the usual behaviour for a friendly meet up.

So when that happened to be the case, it's only natural that someone would feel lied to. Even more so when they find out they're taking

two letters (one continued), a notice, and a poem (continued)

up a role in the event that they had never expected to be taking up. I'm not sure I know anyone in my rather small circle of friends who would be happy with such a situation. Me personally, I would've voiced my unhappiness at it all, then walked out.

Now, the footnote. The idea that women have no responsibility for how men feel is entirely dependent on honesty and trust. If there is dishonesty, then that dishonesty will make someone feel hurt, and it won't be their fault. It will be the fault of the person who chose to be dishonest.

We should be judging people for *who they are* instead of *what they are*, the latter of which is what this re-written article seems to do. If you're willing to brand any group as dangerous, stupid, egocentric and entitled, without even seeing the content of their character, then expect others to react angrily. Pointing this out does not please me. Explaining my thoughts on this matter does not make me smile. I only feel pity for you, living in a world where you won't see the content of people's characters due to your own stereotyping of others.

PS

Please note I have received three letters making this point. Three previous letters made A's point. I published A's letter because it was well-written and because it showed how fearful some people are, and to show a point of view that will be familiar to many of us (not necessarily about men). Many of us struggle with fears, but many of us feel alone in our fears. Judging by the letters I receive, fears are common. Editor.

Has anyone else found that having Asperger syndrome is like being a black man in the 1950s or in certain parts of the American South? No-one will employ you, you can't get voluntary work which involves dealing with the public, or even being on the shop floor; people look at you and treat you as though you're something "different"; a lot of people seem to think you're automatically a criminal; you're not trusted near women. Why is it the human race seems to need someone to hate and look down on?

Richard

Resubscription project

notice by the Goth

Some of you have now received a flier asking you to resubscribe. Please respond in one of the ways listed on the flier. People who don't respond will be sent fliers three times, and after that, as they did not respond, their subscription will end. But please don't worry: if you want to continue to receive *AU*, just respond!

Broken-down friends

by Cliff

Friends are great to have,
But they shouldn't keep breaking down
like an old Ford Popular.

I thought they were built to last,
but they throw a wobbly one
and break with the strain of living.

Friends, who'd have them?
what can you do with them,
breaking up all over the place?

Like china dolls they're fragile,
like puppies they need affection,
like the Mona Lisa they need armour-plating.

Friends, you can't get rid of them,
they're like some disease that does you good;
you bring them flowers

and they cry all over your handkerchief
with a sad sob story
that you once told a year ago.

It's sad to have friends cracking up,
but you have them or you don't;
and if you do, hold them close,
and gather their tears like holy water.

Living on the spectrum: life with Asperger's and autism

by Sam

What is it that you picture when you hear the words Asperger's syndrome, or autism? Is it someone who hides away from the world, surrounded by one particular type of object, who has very little contact with others or someone who is simply very intelligent but has no social skills whatsoever?

In the UK there is still very little awareness and understanding. I just wanted to share my story with you all. I have been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome since the age of 11. From an early age I knew that I was different: I struggled to understand situations, and I struggled on how to cope with change; most of the time I couldn't understand what people wanted from me, which led to misunderstandings and unfortunately left me vulnerable to bullies.

I was called all sorts at school: freak, weirdo, nutter; if I listed them all I would be here all day. I struggle with my coordination, which made PE a nightmare, and my handwriting, and at times my speech — which led to me being mocked, at times physically attacked, and very lonely. All I ever wanted was to fit in at school, to have a friend, but I was too naive to

see what people were really like. The school refused to help me: they told my parents that I just needed to change myself to fit in. My parents then home-educated me, a decision which changed my life for the better. A few months after, they took me to a specialist who diagnosed me.

It took me a long time to understand who I was, that being different didn't necessarily define me, that having this condition can be positive: I notice things that others may not, that sometimes being different and not wanting to hide what you love (in my case a love of anime and manga) can give others freedom to embrace their passions too. When I first began college, after six years of home education, I was truly terrified. I had no clue what to expect: my school memories haunted me — they do to this day. On my first day, I was so nervous I couldn't speak, and spent most of the day hiding like a small child would on their first day at nursery: waiting to go home to their family.

Gradually I built my confidence up: I first built up a rapport with my tutor, working to slowly approach members of my group on their own, before gradually building up to being

able to happily interact with some of my peers. Granted, it hasn't all been plain sailing. In the past four years I have made some incredible friends, broken friends with people I thought were real friends, fallen in love and also had my heart broken. I have managed to achieve good things, tried new experiences and also made mistakes, but would I change any of it? No, as all these things have made me who I am today: a young 20-year-old who tries to pretend to not care so much but really does, who adores her animals and family, gets insanely excited about new video-game releases and loves all things Japanese.

I personally have a lot of experience with autism: aside from my own diagnosis, my little brother has severe autism. I love him with all my heart; there are times that he has challenging behaviours — then he can be outright maddening, especially when he is physically harmful, but the other side to him is a truly magical one: the one that has a smile that can light up a whole room, a laugh that can brighten the darkest of hours and above all else, a real, genuine appreciation for his life, a life where he genuinely cares for his family, where he will come up to you and hug you, and just want to spend time with you. For all the dark

times with him, it's moments like these that make you understand how certain things need not be taken for granted.

I know personally I can bottle things up, partly down to feeling distrustful of others, that I can sometimes handle more than I am capable of which leads to me having a meltdown, that sometimes I may not understand a particular joke or may not understand what is actually happening. I now know that I have strengths, people who care enough about me, and people I care deeply for; that it is okay for me to cry; that sometimes it's fine not to achieve something and there is sometimes a better way.

I am aware of the fact that as a would-be support worker I have chosen a "neurotypical" career: I have had many ask me why, as I have no interest in others, would I want to go into a caring role, how could I possibly know about the feelings and needs of others?

My answer is this: while my life may not have been a normal, happy conventional one, I have been on the outside for a fair amount of my life, I have been singled out for being different, I have seen what it's like to be without friends, to feel that nobody would notice if you disappear. With all these experiences I have made it a personal goal to try make a small difference in the lives of others: to be there when nobody else is, to try and support those I care for, even if they just know that I will be there to listen.

I have met some incredible people in my life, heard their stories. I have had the pleasure of knowing people such as my long-time best friend, who helped me to build my confidence again, and of course my friends at college, who I have shared many laughs and triumphs with, and at times utter frustration, and of course my pen-pals: all these people have seen me at my best and been there for me at my worst, something I am always going to be grateful for.

I may not always get it right, but, just like anyone, I am human, I make mistakes, can be annoying, forgetful and probably care too much: I have Asperger's, but it's part of who I am and I wouldn't change that for the world.

Eye contact

by Thomas

Eye contact has recently become a topic of discussion in the life of a person who has been diagnosed with a form of autism. For me as an individual with Asperger's syndrome, I can understand and appreciate the challenges that are encountered whilst participating in this form of social collaboration. Over the years, my social skills have significantly improved thanks to the wonderful provision from various competent skilful carers in the past. I have succeeded on several occasions to maintain good eye contact with the majority of individuals I am speaking to face to face.

However, I am inclined to say that I have found speaking and sustaining eye contact with large groups of people problematic. This I believe on my part is due to a lack of self-confidence, but in time, I trust that this will improve. I can understand why certain people would become aggravated with a lack of eye contact during a conversation, as it seems as if the listener is disinterested with what is being said, but perhaps if they were more educated on the symptoms and social implications of autism and of its many different forms, then these difficulties could feasibly lessen and the self-confidence of these individuals with this disorder would improve.

I believe that the key to sustaining good eye contact is to have both self-motivational and people skills. If we took the time to listen and acknowledge what the other individual is saying instead of day dreaming, then eye contact I believe will come naturally. It is all about ones self-confidence. If you are relaxed, patient and focused, then it will come effortlessly and eye contact will happen without even thinking about it. Do not try to force it, but let it happen instinctively and the results will come.

Looking forward, looking back: the Janus view of autism

Moving towards a more positive approach in autism

a talk by **Dr Peter Vermeulen**

report by **Jo**

I certainly did not expect to go to a conference, and end up falling a bit in love, but Dr Peter Vermeulen, Co-Director of Autisme Centraal, a training and education centre for people with autism in Belgium, won my heart in less than an hour, by turning many of the perceptions about autistic people's role in society on their head. He was funny and entertaining about it too.

Looking at the DSM-5 criteria for autism, it mentions what is wrong from the non-autistic viewpoint, not what the autistic people themselves think. Autistic cognition is important, and what we should be focusing on, because the criteria that are used to diagnose autism are based on the NT outsider perspective. Autism is more than what you see, and yet that is what is used to define it. Why has it taken so long to recognise sensory issues in autism? It has only just appeared in the DSM-5, yet sensory issues are so very important to autists themselves.

A whole new approach is needed, instead of working from differences, should we be working from the similarities between autists and non-autists? A positive approach is focusing on solutions, not only problems, we should focus on what people with autism need to flourish.

There are two main models of disability: the medical model states that autism is a disorder and needs to be fixed, which implies the autistic individual is at fault. The social model states that there is nothing wrong with individuals with autism, it's the imposition of society that is to blame for our impairments. Peter feels that both models are too linear. The lower-functioning end of the spectrum is more of a medical model of disability than the high-functioning end which

fits the social model better, and the models themselves cannot accommodate this. Too much blame of others is divisive, and creates an "us-and-them" mentality which isn't helpful!

Instead, Peter postulated a citizenship model. Everyone is a citizen in the first place, with freedom to do what they want in life, who have rights to access everything in society that everyone else has. Conversely, everyone has duties too. He felt that everyone with autism should have a job, even those who have limited function. With the right support, everyone has a part to play, and we should be using special interests, and what we are drawn to, to guide what we can do.

Peter noted that when people with autism are relaxed and happy, they display less autistic behaviour. For all of us, people who don't feel well or happy have the tendency to be more rigid and focus on irrelevant details, worry about little things, and dislike change, regardless of if they have autism or not. So instead of insisting that for people to be happy, they need to demonstrate less autistic behaviour first, how about we support them to be happy first, and then perhaps the behaviour will be less of a problem? This is a demonstration of a virtuous circle at work, instead of a vicious one.

Focusing on life outcomes for autistic people was less useful than focusing on their perceived feelings of wellbeing. Again, outcomes criteria are fixed by the neurotypical majority, whereas taking a phenomenological approach allows autistic individuals to define what is actually important to them. In short, society should stop projecting a neurotypical agenda onto autistic people.

Studies show that there is no correlation between the wellbeing of the individual and their quality of life, their intelligence, the severity of their ASD, and amount of support actually given to them. However, their perception of what support they got did correlate highly. If a person felt they needed more support, their happiness was low, if they felt they had enough support, their feelings of wellbeing were high. I know that this is stating the obvious, but I don't think it is said often enough.

Most areas of research and intervention go in increasing social and communication skills. Only 1 study out of the 456 he looked at was aimed at increasing emotional well-being in autistic people. That's barely 0.2%. Peter said we need to change the balance. Our aim is not to make people less autistic, but to make autistic people happy.

All of the speakers at the conference spoke to my mind, but he talked to my heart as well. If you are autistic, as I am, that's a rare thing indeed.

The journey

by Neil

I live in a world of dogs. They regard me with concern, suspicion; even fear.

"You look like one of us," they say. "You have four legs, a tail, fur and pointy ears. Yet you don't act like us: you wag your tail when you are angry, not happy. You speak differently too — you yowl instead of barking, and you make a strange rumbling growl when you are happy. We don't understand you, so we fear you.

"You are not sociable. We like to hang around in packs, chasing and playing with each other. You spit at us whenever we go near you.

"You climb trees. Whoever heard of a dog that climbs trees?

"You are a broken dog. You are different. You are not one of us. Therefore, you are dangerous.

"Go away. We do not want you near us."

I felt ashamed to be a broken dog. I had tried to fit in with the other dogs, but clearly it was my own fault that they did not want me around. I had not tried hard enough. I was a failure. And so I was cast into the wilderness, condemned to wander the world in solitary penance.

Now and then I'd catch fleeting glimpses of what I thought were other broken dogs like me, but they were like wraiths, lost in mist before I could catch up with them.

After many years of travel from place to place, trying to find a home and an identity, I encountered a sage. He treated me kindly and explained who I really was.

"You are not a broken dog. You are not dangerous. You are a cat."

A cat? I had never heard of these creatures. Who were they? Why was I one of them? I had many questions for the sage, and with patience and kindness he answered them for me.

Most importantly, I had a sense of belonging; of community. I was a cat! And there were other cats just like me!

The sage introduced me to some of the other cats. For the first time, I was with others who were the same as me. We yowled; we climbed trees, we wagged our tails when we were annoyed. I understood them, and they could understand me.

I am a cat. I am home. I am happy.

An Aspie documentary on BBC TV?

by Heidi

There have been quite a few programmes on TV featuring Aspies this past year.

I'm wondering if the next thing might be an Attenborough nature series featuring Aspies in their own natural habitat . . .?

"And now we have the camera hidden in the bushes outside of an Aspie dwelling . . . if we sit here quietly the Aspie might emerge . . . yes, here he comes . . . yes definitely a male one . . . you can tell by the black socks and trousers . . . Aspies are often known to be quite shy and reserved creatures . . . they are also a highly intelligent and focused species

"Look closely . . . (camera moves in) this one appears to be very organised . . . he has a list which he's carefully written out. If we watch him closely, we'll see that he walks along quickly, head slightly on one side or tilted forward If he's disturbed in the pursuance of his objective he may appear slightly bemused . . . this is quite normal as most Aspies don't like being diverted from their special interests. Some of them can remain very focused for days at a time . . . even forgetting to eat! Aspies sometimes send others out foraging for them, reducing the need to emerge from their natural habitat

"Here we see an example of a neurotypical trying to communicate with an Aspie . . . the Aspie looks away, but realising that the neurotypical is in front of him and expecting a response, the Aspie makes a brief comment and then withdraws back into their corner

"Some Aspies have very specialised abilities . . . if we look at this one . . . he doesn't want to be seen . . . this Aspie has spent most of his life in an organ loft . . . it's a quiet place with a

low level of lighting . . . the Aspie has a good vantage point and can look for likely predators in the large mirror above his head . . . he can also ward them off with very loud noises, causing them to think that he is very much larger and more fearsome than he really is This sophisticated defence mechanism is highly developed and is similar to that used by a puffer fish who inflates himself in order to look bigger to predators

If we focus the camera, we can see a female Aspie . . . this one has also developed a way of dealing with predators . . . she has voluminous sleeves which are puffed up . . . after spending time in close proximity to neurotypicals she withdraws into her natural habitat where she enjoys her flock-covered inflatable cushions and sofa and a variety of other objects which are meaningful and soothing for her"



The rules of *Asperger United*

(contact information for AU is on page 2 and again on page 20)

- 1) *Asperger United* is funded by the NAS and readers' donations, and is independent of the NAS. Although it is called "*Asperger United*" it aims to be for the whole of the (reading) autism spectrum. That is, the concerns and joys of any subscriber on the spectrum can be printed, not just Asperger's.
- 2) *Asperger United* is free and is quarterly, published in January, April, July and October. If you do not receive a copy when you expect to, please contact AU.
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- 6) If you move house, please inform *Asperger United* and include your old address as well as your new address.
- 7) Even if you've paid for the Royal Mail forwarding service (or another forwarding service if you live outside Great Britain and Northern Ireland), you still need to inform *Asperger United* that you have moved address.
- 8) If you phone and leave a message on the machine, please speak slowly and clearly and spell uncommon words, as the line isn't very clear. Please give any phone number you leave twice for the same reason. Remember to give your postal address so that we can find your record.
- 9) You do not have to be a member of the NAS to subscribe to *Asperger United*.
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- 14) Book reviews are the most popular thing in *Asperger United*, please consider submitting one. They can be about any book, not just books about autism. Also, they do not have to be short (the Goth keeps most of his reviews short to leave more space for other writers). If you do not want your review to appear in the NAS section of the Amazon website, please make this clear.
- 15) Although each issue is themed, submissions on any subject are welcome. Only some of the letters and articles in each issue will follow the theme. All submissions may be edited, especially for privacy, libel, and for fitting the space available.

Autscape 2016: An *autistic* conference

Giggleswick School, Settle, North Yorkshire, BD24 0DE

Tuesday, 16 August – Friday, 19 August 2016

An annual residential conference and retreat organised *by* and *for* autistic people.

This year's theme is *Identity*.

What we offer:

- Autistic-friendly environment
- Meet other autistics, including those with Asperger's
- Non-autistics and those without a diagnosis are equally welcome
- Workshops and presentations
- Autistic-friendly leisure activities including a sensory room and *Sparklies in the dark*
- Quiet rural location with indoor swimming and sports facilities
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- Day-time childcare included

- Full board — three meals a day plus tea and coffee breaks included in price
- Travel to and from venue arranged from Settle and Giggleswick train stations (for extra fee).

Registration will take place via the website and details will be posted there.

Further information regarding the conference, registration and our attendance fees is on our website:

www.autscape.org

Email enquiries: **info@autscape.org**

Postal enquiries:

Autscape
Armstrong House
First Avenue
Robin Hood Airport
Doncaster
DN9 3GA

Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG

Telephone: **0808 800 1050** (free from most landlines) or

Telephone: **020 7923 5779** (geographical charges apply)

Email: **asp.utd@nas.org.uk**

Website: **www.autism.org.uk/aspergerunited**



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