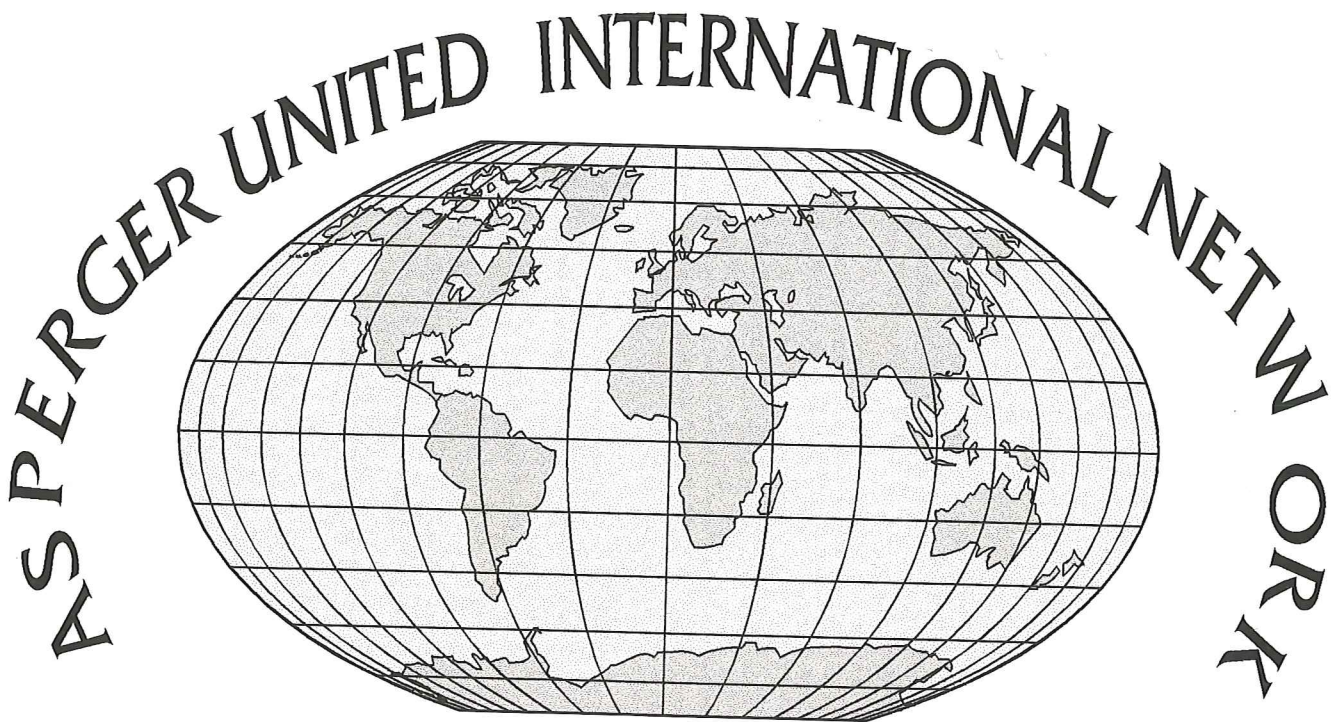
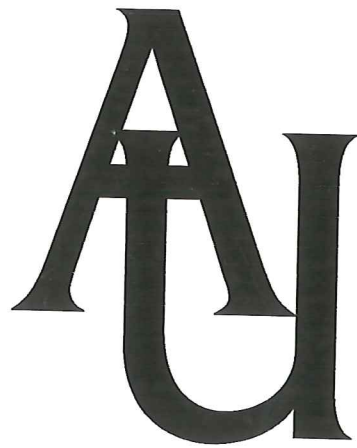


Asperger United



No. 13 - AUGUST 1997

Asperger United is a self-help Newsletter run by and for people with Asperger Syndrome. Its aim is to put people with the condition in touch with one another and to provide them with information so that they can lead more independent lives.

The Asperger United Newsletter is produced by an editorial group consisting of the two current Editors; Ian Reynolds; John Joyce; assisted by Pam Yates from The Maudsley Hospital's Home Based Team For Autistic Individuals with additional support from The National Autistic Society.

## **ASPERGER UNITED**

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## 1) Letter from the Editors

Dear readers

SO SORRY you have had to wait so long for this edition of Asperger United. Due to relocation of The National Autistic Society and changes in staffing chaos has reigned! Hopefully now however we are back on track. This time with a bumper edition of the newsletter. For the first-time with our new Logo, designed by artist and long time supporter of the newsletter, Graeme Lawson! Thank you Graeme.

Thank you too to Mark Bebbington for all his support in running this newsletter. Mark has been promoted in the NAS (so he should have, he is now one of the longest standing employees of the Society!!) Good luck Mark in your new post and thank you for all your help. Thank you too to Judy Lynch who is continuing to type this newsletter. We could not do without you Judy!

Please continue sending contributions to the newsletter to:- Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NE.

There may also be some other changes in the newsletter soon ..... making it bigger and better. We will keep you informed of these changes. Enjoy reading this edition and thanks for your patience.

**Your Editors - Ian, John, Pam, Judy**

\* \* \* \* \*

### From your new Editor

Dear Friends

I am John Joyce your new Editor. I was diagnosed an Asperger syndrome sufferer in 1992. I have been a member of a Social Skills Group at the Maudsley Hospital since then.

I work for the home office, Immigration & Asylum Directorate, specifically preparing Asylum appeal papers for hearing.

Additionally, I am pursuing an Open University degree in languages and I am a member of the legion of Mary, an apostolic organisation in the Catholic Church. I am interested in sport, language and travel - I collect sports programmes and also have a selection of audio cassettes of languages music and religious matter. In respect of travel I have a wide selection of town maps of Britain and some from overseas. I have travelled to various parts of Europe, to Israel and the USA.

I was born in Glasgow in 1944 of Irish parents, but have lived in the London area since the age of six months. I have two brothers, two sisters, six nephews and two nieces. I was godfather to my new nephew, Colm, in February, going to Edinburgh for the baptismal ceremony.

Enough about me, now for some information recently received. Merry Barva of Action for Autism, New Delhi, in response to my letter informs us that autism and Asperger syndrome are not understood in India. Though many people have Asperger syndrome, the education system does not recognise the disorder, some children being educated in mainstream schools, by implication, those not in the mainstream are left out altogether.

Merry has also asked to see our magazine and I have sent her a copy of a previous edition.

### News from the rest of Europe

**Ireland** - Pat and Nuala Matthews, who run the Irish Society for Autism, were Irish "People of the Year" 1996 for their work in championing the rights of autistic people and promoting the Autism-Europe Charter for people with autism which is also published in this edition.

Autism-Europe Congress in 2000 to be held in Glasgow.

**France** has adopted a new law recognising autism as a disability and requiring that 'adequate' services be made available for the care of people with autism. How this will be put into effect by the newly elected Government remains to be seen.

An international exhibition of art by people with autism was held in May in Burgos **Spain**. I will try to obtain a report on this matter from the organisers.

A new international magazine *Autism* will appear in July 1997. It will highlight research and practice.



2) **Autism & Employment**

- a) 'The Career Trap'  
by Thomas Madar
  
- b) 'Anti-Discrimination legislation is Not the Sole Answer'  
by David Shamash

Don't forget if you feel you could benefit from Supported Employment contact The National Autistic Society's own Supported Employment Scheme at:-

Prospects Employment Scheme  
The National Autistic Society - 4th Floor  
393 City Road  
London, EC1 1NE                      Tel: 0171 903 3580

## THE CAREER TRAP.

Career difficulties faced by academically able people with Asperger's syndrome.

### 1. INTRODUCTION.

Why is it that a lot of academically successful people with Asperger's syndrome people fail to prosper in employment. On the course, they do well; practical work and exams present no special problems; tutors and teaching staff sing their praises and are eager to provide good references. They then attempt to enter the world of employment, only to encounter severe and unforeseen problems! The outcome is long term unemployment, dismissal for a number of personal reasons like "he works too slowly", "she does not communicate effectively", "he does not fit in", "she is not the right person for the job", or relegation to routine work suitable for a person who is much less qualified.

Lucia Arandt, a consultant and a speaker at the 1991 Inge Wakehurst weekend conference on adults with Asperger's syndrome at Wokingham, is certainly aware of some characteristics in Asperger adults causing a crisis in an employment situation which is likely to result in either the loss of the job or a need for professional intervention. At the same conference, an understanding employer (Robin Whittle) certainly describes some characteristics in a very intelligent (and well qualified) software engineer which certainly led to serious problems with a newly recruited supervisor, and which with less understanding employers, would have led to eventual dismissal. My career history from 1978 (after a period of higher education) has been a succession of software engineering jobs interspersed with periods of postgraduate study. While I prospered at study, eight of my eleven and a half years in employment were blighted by various difficulties resulting from some typical characteristics of Asperger's syndrome.

It appears that some characteristics which matter little on academic courses suddenly become a big issue in employment...or some characteristics which are a big issue in employment matter little on academic courses. The aim of this essay is to discuss how the characteristics of Asperger's syndrome influence academic and employment performance, to identify the problems, and to provide a solution.

### 2. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ASPERGER'S SYNDROME.

A person with Asperger's Syndrome has a number of characteristics in his or her make-up which may seriously affect his or her ability to perform certain tasks. For the purposes of this essay, the following characteristics are assumed to be correct:-

#### 2.1 A difficulty in picking up the unwritten rules of society.

The affected person fails to automatically acquire the many implicit rules of living in society making it necessary for him or her to be explicitly instructed. There is the advantage that this lack of conformance may lead to a welcome degree of originality in many areas. However, this is counterbalanced by difficulties (instances of unusual or unacceptable behavior) posed by a lack of socialization to the norms of society.

#### 2.2 A difficulty in picking up non verbal signals from others.

The affected person fails to respond to non verbal cues from other people and does not adjust any social encounter to cater for the person's age, status or emotional state. The person appears to lack empathy. He or she will not pickup signals of dishonesty, and so will be vulnerable to unscrupulous people.



## THE CAREER TRAP

### 2.3 A difficulty in perceiving what other people are thinking of or will think of in given situations.

This characteristic brings the same problems as 2.1. When the affected person engages in an activity which affects other people, he or she is unlikely to have their future thoughts in his or her mind. Thus he or she is not restrained from executing that activity in an offensive or peculiar way.

### 2.4 A difficulty in formulating and verbalizing communicable thoughts.

The affected person has difficulty in generating a spontaneous verbal response to a stimulus such as a conversational opening or a job interview question. Where one is generated, difficulty is experienced in presenting it at the right speed, in the right tone of voice, and accompanied by the appropriate non verbal signals. Deficiency in this area radiates an impression of lack of intelligence, lack of confidence, dishonesty etc rendering the affected person liable to rejection or loss of status.

### 2.5 A raised anxiety state.

An advantage of a raised anxiety state is that, fearful of the consequences of what would happen otherwise, the person is highly organized in everything he or she arranges, exercises great caution in everything which he or she does, and practices honesty and integrity. These three attributes are very welcome in our society (though not always respected). However, the person is disadvantaged in several areas. For example, a fear of retribution will make the person hesitate to defend him or herself when encountering difficult people, and so he or she will be trodden on. Small discrepancies in a well ordered routine may cause undue worry. A specific fear, for example, of public spaces or dark tunnels will bring burdensome restrictions to the affected person's way of life.

### 2.6 Sensitivity to small discrepancies.

The affected person is sensitive to everything which is even slightly out of order in several areas of life. On the plus side, this makes the person very scrupulous in any thing he or she does, taking care to turn out work of the highest quality. On the minus side, high quality work takes a long time to complete, a disadvantage when tight deadlines have to be met. In addition, small annoyances such as a shop sold out of a favorite brand become sizeable frustrations.

### 2.7 Concentration difficulty.

The affected person has difficulty in concentrating on a piece of work and daydreams. This slows work down and is not popular where tight deadlines have to be met.

### 2.8 Clumsiness at sports.

The affected person has difficulty in mastering sports and games requiring more than the simplest coordinated body movements.

### 2.9 A very focused set of interests.

The affected person has a very keen interest in a highly specialized area, for example, the advertising and packaging of sweets. The specialism may be the basis of a worthwhile hobby and lead to some good career openings.

### 2.10 Islands of extraordinary ability.

The affected person is outstandingly gifted in one or more areas outside social and verbal communication skills. An effective path to fulfilling employment opportunities.

Having defined these characteristics, we now investigate how these influence a person's competence in various tasks.

3.0 THE INFLUENCE OF ASPERGER SYNDROME ON PERSONAL COMPETENCE.

At this point, it is useful to introduce the concept of a **personal ability profile**. Given a particular task, each of us would differ in his or her ability to do it. For example, given the task of leading a playgroup, some people would be excellent, others fair, and others poor. Furthermore, those who are good at one task may be poor at another. For example, a good playgroup leader may be poor at writing a magazine article and vice versa. These variations of performance between persons in a particular task and between tasks for a particular person arise because each of us has a **unique** variation of competence over a spectrum of task types. Such a variation is called a **personal ability profile**.

Each Asperger's syndrome characteristic constrains or augments an aspect of person's natural ability profile as shown in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1. THE EFFECT OF ASPERGER'S SYNDROME ON A PERSONAL ABILITY PROFILE.

CHAR. NO.	ABILITY CONSTRAINED.	ABILITY AUGMENTED.
2.1	Conformance to implicit rules and instructions. All interpersonal skills.	Originality.
2.2	All interpersonal skills.	
2.3	All interpersonal skills.	
2.4	All interpersonal skills.	
2.5	Leadership skills. Assertiveness skills. Patience in adversity.	Organization skills. Honesty and integrity. Caution.
2.6	Speed of work. Patience in adversity.	Quality of work. Patience in work.
2.7	Speed of work.	
2.8	Sporting skills.	
2.9		Academic ability in the subject(s) of interest.
2.10		Various depending on ability affected.



## THE CAREER TRAP

Table 1 indicates that ability profile of a person with Asperger's syndrome is strengthened and weakened in the following areas:-

### Strengthened.

Originality.  
Caution.  
Honesty and integrity.  
Quality of work.  
Patience at work.  
Organization.  
Academic ability in any interesting specialized area.  
Others in which an unusual ability is demonstrated.

### Weakened.

All interpersonal skills.  
Conformance to implicit rules and instructions.  
Speed of work.  
Patience in adversity.  
Sporting skills.

Now, how does the effect of Asperger's syndrome on a person's ability profile influence performance in academia and employment? First, it is necessary to find out what is expected of the person in each environment.

## 4.0 THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT.

Success or failure on any academic course is universally governed by the following factors:-

- Attendance at lectures, practicals and tutorials (taught courses only),
- Standard of coursework,
- Adherence to deadlines for the submission of coursework for marking,
- Performance in examinations (taught courses only).

Thus to succeed in academia, the following personal attributes are essential:-

- A good interest in the studied subject(s)
- Good authorship skills (for essays, reports and dissertations),
- Specialized skills necessary to complete appropriate practical work well,
- Specialized skills necessary to complete appropriate written work well,
- Good personal organizing skills,
- Good prioritizing skills, (to cope with concurrent coursework and exam revision),
- Good reading and note taking skills,
- Good examination revision skills,
- Good examination sitting skills
- A good memory (to cope with examinations).

## 5.0 THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE EMPLOYER.

There are so many employers offering so many different types of posts that the factors governing success or failure in employment are much harder to define. I am most familiar with the requirements of employers who specialize in producing large software systems for individual customers.

On joining such an employer, a typical graduate will undergo a period of specialized training to fit him/her to the employer's requirements. Then he/she will be assigned as a member of a team on a software engineering project involved in writing bespoke software. At first, he or she will be coding, then later on, doing some verification and design work. After the first two or three years, he/she is likely to be assigned a leadership role, first being responsible for a team, then later, a project comprising a number of teams. At this stage, an ability to liaise with customers is expected. As the years pass by, the former graduate will be responsible for bigger and bigger projects.

## THE CAREER TRAP

Different factors govern success or failure at different stages of of the graduate's career. At first, the factors are:-

- Standard of practical and written work,
- Adherence to deadlines for the completion of assignments,
- Relations with team members and management.

Later on, the following additional factors count:-

- Leadership ability,
- Customer liaison and salesmanship skills.

In all cases, success hinges on a team leader/manager's personal opinion of his/her performance and is heavily influenced by personal likes and dislikes. Total impartiality in a work related performance appraisal is not as likely as in academic course assessment.

Thus to succeed in the above scenario, the following personal attributes are essential:-

- Interest and enthusiasm in the area of work,
- Quick learning ability (training time is money),
- Specialized technical skills necessary to complete work assignments well,
- Good authorship skills (for any documentation production),
- Good personal organizing skills,
- Good prioritizing skills (to cope with concurrent work assignments),
- At least, a moderately fast working ability in a variety of given conditions (time is money and customer satisfaction, and a missed deadline may lose more than a few marks. In a number of companies, there is a premium placed on being able to complete tasks not only quickly, but with less than minimal guidance),
- Interpersonal skills necessary to get on with management,
- Interpersonal skills necessary to get on with colleagues,
- Interpersonal skills necessary to get the best out of subordinates,
- Interpersonal skills necessary to give a good impression to customers,
- Interpersonal skills necessary to sell company services to customers.

### 6.0 RELATIVE PROSPECTS ON AN ACADEMIC COURSE AND IN EMPLOYMENT.

TABLE 2 analyses the personal attributes required in an academic course and the above employment scenario in the light of the ability profile of a person with Asperger's syndrome discussed in Section 3.



## THE CAREER TRAP

TABLE 2. ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC AND EMPLOYER ABILITY EXPECTATIONS.

Is expectation advantageous or disadvantageous?	Personal attributes essential to an academic course	Personal attributes essential for employment in scenario.
ADVANTAGEOUS	A good interest in the studied subjects. Specialized skills necessary to complete appropriate practical work well. Specialized skills necessary to complete appropriate written work well. Good personal organizing skills. A good memory?	Interest and enthusiasm in the area of work. Specialized technical skills necessary to complete work assignments well. Good personal organizing skills.
NO EFFECT	Good authorship skills. Good prioritizing skills. Good reading and note taking skills. Good examination revision skills. Good examination sitting skills. A good memory?	Quick learning ability. Good authorship skills. Good prioritizing skills.
DISADVANTAGEOUS		At least, a moderately fast working ability in a working ability in a variety of given conditions. Interpersonal skills necessary to get on with management. Interpersonal skills necessary to get on with colleagues. Interpersonal skills necessary to get the best out of subordinates. Interpersonal skills necessary to give a good impression to customers. Interpersonal skills necessary to sell company services to customers.

From this, it is obvious that there are problems once he or she is in employment.

On an academic course, strengths in personal organization and in the ability to produce good quality, original work will be an advantage. If the course covers an area of specialized interest, than this advantage is increased. Any problems resulting from a slow work rate can be remedied by working extra hours.

Once in employment (given the above software house scenario), the strengths displayed in academia will continue to act in his or her favour. However, this advantage is likely to be outweighed by a lack of essential interpersonal skills and an inability to progress a task very quickly, particularly if the person is expected to pick this up and get on with it with an absolute minimum of guidance.

This double disadvantage may become apparent soon after engagement, and in any case, usually results in sanctions varying from a lack of promotion to dismissal for poor performance.

### 7.0 WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Two viewpoints generate two approaches to the problem. The first states that given enough help, support, coaching and coercion, a person with Asperger's syndrome will lose his or her shortcomings to reach normality. The onus lies wholly on the affected person to adapt to the demands of society and no special allowances should be made except on a very temporary basis. The second states that the affected person is not capable of losing any shortcomings to any degree, and hence will never even approach normality. The onus lies on society to make permanent allowances for that person's shortcomings.

The first approach, therefore, is to give the person specialized coaching to enable him or her to meet fully the expectations of employers. This coaching would be applied over a period of time spanning from well before the end of his or her education to well after the commencement of his or her first job. At the end of it all, the affected person should be able to perform well in any type of work.

However, is Asperger's Syndrome as totally curable as the first approach suggests? A number of professionals, parents and sufferers would be inclined to disagree. The cause and an effective cure remains unknown.

The second approach would be to find employment to suit the ability profile of the affected person. Given that this person's abilities are affected as described in Section 3, this would mean a job with the following attributes:-

#### Personal Qualities Which Should Be Important.

- original and creative thinking,
- the ability to produce enduring work of good quality,
- high degree of personal organization,
- honesty and integrity,
- patience,
- caution,
- specialized skills relevant to the job.

#### Personal Qualities Which Must Not Be Important.

- excellent interpersonal and communication skills,
- effective persuasion skills,
- effective team leadership skills,
- the ability to produce work very quickly,
- the ability to master a given assignment quickly with absolutely minimal guidance,
- physical co-ordination.

A big difficulty, particularly in this harsh economic climate, is the availability of employers who are willing to offer such jobs, but there must be some openings where excellent social skills, effective leadership skills, and the ability to work very fast with the absolute minimum of guidance are not important.

Also, is a person with Asperger's syndrome totally incapable of any improvement? I feel that given the right kind of guidance and support, the affected person is capable of substantially diminishing the shortcomings which place restrictions on his or her employment success. However, patience is required as the process may take a number of years. In my case, people have noticed an enormous improvement in my interpersonal and communication skills over the past fifteen years.



### 8.0 A SUGGESTED SOLUTION.

The problem can be tackled by adopting a hybrid approach which assumes that though Asperger's syndrome is a lifelong disability, associated shortcomings can be diminished over a number of years given the right kind of guidance and support.

The process of preparing the person for his or her career should begin as the person enters their fifth form at school. At this stage, it should concentrate on training in interpersonal and other general skills which employers welcome. Improved interpersonal skills will win friends and the respect of other people. They will successfully sell the person into positions of responsibility. Self esteem will be improved.

Preparation should concentrate on this training until the person's final year in education, be it school or college. A thorough assessment should be made of his or her ability profile. This, in conjunction with subjects studied and personal preferences, should be used to build a profile of the person's ideal job.

Job hunting will vary depending on what degree the person is disabled by Asperger's syndrome. A slightly affected person will be able to search for work in the normal way, but with extra help being given in preparing for interviews and in assessing the true suitability of the job being applied for. For greater degrees of disability, specific placement is necessary with an employer who is well prepared beforehand, to take the rough and the smooth of accepting a person with Asperger's syndrome. In all cases, it is essential that the job matches the ability profile of the person applying for it and is as close to the 'ideal job' as it is possible to get.

Once in work, outside professional support should be available to enable the affected person to improve social and teamworking skills, and to provide additional guidance over that given by a manager for the successful completion of a task. Given appropriate encouragement, a considerable improvement in interpersonal skills and self confidence may be realized.

Over time, inter-departmental moves, promotions and changes in personnel will mean that the affected person will come under new management. Problems will be caused by an intolerant management who are not prepared to accept the affected person for what he or she is. To overcome these, care should be taken to ensure the affected person is always supervised by a professional manager who is competent in getting the best out of his or her staff. Then there is the need for education. A slightly affected person should be encouraged to tell this management about his condition and the constraints which this imposes. A more severely affected person may necessitate a rather more thorough preparation from a support worker or other professional.

### 9.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This essay has focused on problems likely to be faced by people with Asperger's Syndrome in employment.

First, the specific strengths and weaknesses which a person with this condition was likely to have, were determined. Strengths discerned were originality, honesty, integrity, caution, perseverance in producing work of outstanding quality, and specialized knowledge in areas of interest. Areas of weakness were in all types of interpersonal skills, the picking up of implicit rules and instructions, speed of work, calmness in adverse situations and sporting skills.

## THE CAREER TRAP

Next, the strengths and weaknesses outlined above were used to identify any problems in the workplace. While the expectations of an academic environment presented no problems, an analysis of a representative working environment demanded strengths in the area of interpersonal skills and the fast completion of work which the person with Asperger's Syndrome lacked. This could result in demotion or dismissal for the affected person.

Finally, a solution to this problem was discussed on the assumption that Asperger's Syndrome is a partially curable lifelong condition. This consist of the following four actions:-

- Training to improve interpersonal skills and hence, relations with people and self confidence.
- Construction of a profile of strengths and weaknesses and of an ideal job situation.
- Job search assistance varying from training in interview techniques to specific placement with a well prepared employer depending on the severity of the condition.
- In-work education and support to improve to resolve any areas of discomfort, to ensure that those responsible for the affected person are aware of his or her condition, and to combat prejudice and discrimination.

We conclude that since Asperger's Syndrome is a lifelong condition affecting areas other than intellectual ability, the acquisition of academic qualifications does not imply that the condition is cured. The only effective means of avoiding major career problems is likely to be with a high degree of specialized guidance and support extending from secondary school years until well into the affected person's working life. Professional help over this time span may be expensive, but the alternatives are likely to be problems with employers, assignment to work way below that person's capabilities, or long term unemployment. The cost of all this may well outweigh the cost of such help.

Thomas Madar

## Anti-discrimination legislation is not the sole answer

By David Shamash

I worked to six months in the House of Commons as a general assistant from 25/9/95 until 29/3/96. I really acted as a kind of messenger. My work involved delivering post around the annexe and taking letters to other departments including the main House. The work also included shredding, photocopying and updating message boards. I found this full-time job a great strain having been unemployed for 17 years, since losing a job in the Inland Revenue after three months for being too slow at filing. I also lost that job because they found me odd and I did not even know then that I had Asperger syndrome.

I was employed in the House of Commons because the employment agency 'Status' discovered that I was interested in politics and negotiated with the House of Commons on my behalf. Status (based in Croydon) find work and supports people with Asperger syndrome and learning difficulties in employment. (By the way, there is a year's waiting list for new people needing help.) At the interview the interviewer said they were giving me the job to give me a chance to work and if I did well it could be permanent. The House of Commons and Status tried hard to make the contract work for six months. A young helper from Status called Tracy came and showed me what to do every day at first and then faded support. The House of Commons was also helpful by changing the labels on their trays and my three colleagues were quite patient. I must make it clear that it was essential at the beginning to have support from Tracy. On the other hand it meant that with Tracy and me there were five people in an office meant for three.

There were frequent reviews of my work and I was warned that I might have to leave at short notice if I did not make the grade, but I was only present at two of them. About six weeks before the end they said that I would stay till the end of my contract, but that I could not be kept on after that as they did not have enough money for an extra person and they would not have the room as the post room was moved into the office. Although one person is going on maternity leave and someone is retiring next year I could not replace someone leaving as there were parts of the job I could not do.

It is true that I have poor orientation and found it difficult to find my way around when delivering to other departments and I am not good at carrying heavy loads and was tired in the afternoon. They said they would look into the possibility of a part-time job somewhere else in the House, perhaps in the library. I left them in a friendly way with presents and an encouraging reference (saying the I am not better equipped to get another job). However, a month later they wrote to Status saying that they could not find me another job in the House and that they cannot replace the person on maternity leave with someone else from Status as they need someone who can do their full quota of work and it is not always practicable to give disabled people work.

My purpose in writing this article is to show that the recently passed Government's Disability Discrimination Act (nor the Civil Rights Bill which was defeated) is not the way to get disabled people like me employed because they are going to get rid of the quota system and the register of disabled people. It is true that large employers as well as not discriminating will have to make some alterations to their work places, but they will be able to turn away many disabled people by telling them that they cannot do their full quota. They are therefore



being discriminated against indirectly because of their disability. Under the present system the 3% quota is not enforced and disabled people find it difficult to get permanent employment as most openings for disabled people are either on courses or schemes giving the dole plus £10 a week or at best like the one I was on, a temporary contract. The way to get disabled people employed is perhaps to keep this anti-discrimination legislation for the more able, but keep the quota system and enforce it with fines using the money to help more disabled people or subsidise employers for taking them on permanently with proper pay.



### **3) Thoughts on having autism**

**..... some of the problems; some of the joys and some ways to help yourself!**

- a) 'Separate But Equal'  
by Jasmine Lee O'Neil
- b) 'Questions I Get Asked'  
by Marc Segar
- c) 'Beyond childhood'  
by Andrew Walker
- d) 'Autism'  
by Matthew Griffin
- e) 'My Life as a Sufferer of Asperger Autism'  
by Diane Webster
- f) 'Asperger Syndrome'  
by Simon Beddow

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL  
An Essay on Autism

By Jasmine Lee O'Neill

We live in a haunting world on the insides of ourselves. We are separate but equal.

Autism is not a disease. It is a gift only we who live inside autistic spheres can understand. Because of profound differences of behaviour, autistic children become cursed outcasts. The vast outside doesn't care to know them. They're either shut away in homes for the retarded, or they're expected to learn the ways of a hostile, alien world of other humans and at least pretend to act and live the way others act and live. Some are even medicated with dangerous drugs to try to make them more so-called normal.

To take away a little child's inner home of safety is a sin of society. As an autistic child sits rocking, humming quietly, she is usually labelled many words with definitions of negativity. These words bound from the tongues of strangers who patronise because they have no time to learn, only time to judge. She is denied the respect of even a so-called normal child, which is hardly much. Children generally aren't much respected, and grown ups treat them as if they've no rights to privacy. Autistic and other unique-spirited children have even less a right to privacy, according to outsiders, and it is autistic children who need it most.

Consider the image of the young autistic miss who is gifted with extraordinary sense organs. The countless beautiful experiences she is fed with form an enriching personal inner realm. She uses this to create little drawings with intense colour and minute detail. She sees with more than eyes. She sees what others don't. She is quite fascinated with small kitchen utensils. Her drawings are perfect paper replicas of glittering crystal salt shakers, pepper grinders, flatware with gleaming handles. These tiny treasures absorb her attention. Some surrounding adults may compliment her abilities to show detail and perspective. Without formal art training, she sees all the reality of the pepper grinder or flatware in her mind. Her autistic gift of an obsession for sameness is transformed into art with the precision of a photograph. Yet some surrounding adults with their know-better attitudes quite intact may come along to say, "But, what art is this? Such a young child, and she's obsessing over inanimate objects." What business is that of anyone's? She is joyful with things others don't find joy in. That is the root of original thinking. It is different, not wrong.

Consider the work of Pop artists of the 1960's. Who is to say there is only one steel definition of art? If there would be no deviation from what is called traditional or acceptable, then there would never be newness. There never would burst forth ballet by Stravinsky, there never would be any poetic techniques to follow Lord Byron and Shakespeare. There would be no Dylan Thomas or Maya Angelou. There never would be any Beatles, Pete Townshend, or Broadway. There would be no Picasso, O'Keefe, Frida Kahlo, or Kandinsky to follow Michelangelo. All of these people would exist, but would never be appreciated. It's only personal opinion which decides either old or new is best. Many artists had or have autistic traits, or even would be considered fully autistic

by present-day doctors.

Autism can be a way of examining things in innovative ways. Growing up autistic, one is called many names: retarded, idiot, freak, special, strange, weirdo, daft, abnormal, nutty, a waste. Almost always, these names are derogatory. Imagine living years, carrying these or other labels on your back like a load of coal, damned to wear these words as though they be etched into your face. Imagine physicians, teachers, and other professionals talking about how bad you are, or how much of a victim you are because you have Autism. Time is spent trying to force you to snuff out who you are so you become what others have in mind for you to become.

Not all autistic children and adults are intellectually retarded. In my opinion, many of them who test in mentally retarded ranges are not. Autism can actually be a form of genius. Some intelligences can't be measured on conventional tests. Brilliance can be undetected by those who are blind to it, especially if it takes an un-orthodox form. Performing with low scores on standardised IQ tests doesn't mean someone is mentally retarded. Some brilliant people with certain types of learning disabilities have difficulties taking regular tests, or even reading.

Autistic savants generally lack the skills that people around them have easily, yet the savant gift itself does of course involve intelligence. Instead of saying that the autistic brain is damaged, it would be more truthful to call it a separate phenomenon that functions differently than a non-autistic brain. Diversity is a blessing.

Why should not every being be proud of who she or he is? There is something gone awry with a society that condemns an autistic child to a lifetime of never being good enough. Why must they be made to work so hard to act like others? Many Japanese are proud to be Japanese, and don't strive to become French. A Japanese living in Paris will always look Japanese, just as an autistic person will always be autistic. If there is an incident of an autistic child being cured, then that child wasn't purely autistic in the first place. Some characteristics of Autism can be masked over time, but I consider this a covering over of the truth to suit others, unless it happens naturally.

Autism usually is innate, even if it doesn't show up until some months or two years after birth. In studies of autistic twins, mono-zygotic (identical) twins were almost always **both** autistic. Di-zygotic (non-identical) twins sets contained **one autistic** child, **one non-autistic** child. In classical Autism there is a genetic factor preconceived, perhaps at the earliest stages of fertilisation.

There are many pluses to being autistic, which are ignored or not recognised by the people who are always saying how horrible it is. The attitude of the 1960's and 1970's was to consider autistics psychotic or brain-damaged, and many were put into asylums. In subtle ways, that attitude creeps into the present day mentality. The autistic child is known to be a result of organic factors, but a huge amount of professionals still strive to discover what goes wrong with development, rather than striving to discover how an unusual mind works, and using information to further appreciate various types of human beings. I suppose Autism can be made horrible. Most things can be made horrible. But it can also be seen as intriguing, even beautiful.

Self-abuse in Autism can be caused by various issues, including a struggle to communicate, striving to shut away the outside, or inner desperation in sensing the overwhelming negative thoughts of family



members. Many parents of autistic ones are nurturing. Many are not so. Attitude will hugely affect children who are born profoundly sensitive. Parental attitude will strengthen families if the special child is accepted and loved. To learn autistic ways will an education for parents. To bombard the child with rigid non-acceptance and demands that she or he "conform" or "change" or "behave" or "speak" or "act normal" is to tell the child with deep intentions that she or he is inferior. That is a grave error.

If an autistic child doesn't speak, that means not that he has no communication. Many children of Autism need individual education away from mainstream class environments. The teaching must be loving and respectful. The child has power as a human being. The child will choose what he or she will or won't learn. Also, the child has individual abilities, like every child has. Autism can be quite maddeningly contradictory and unequal in terms of ability, such as "splinter skills" in savants.

Autistic children show their raw emotions and their simple honesty, and that frightens others. Autistics who say what is on their mind are chastised for rudeness. The laws of etiquette of society are illogical to an autistic person. It isn't so terrible to have an individual who seems strange and hovers aside from groups of chatting people. It's less stressful to go your own way than to constantly fret over how to fit in.

Autistic people can't dissect ambivalent messages they receive from parents and others, such as: "Be honest" and "Be polite". Those two, according to society's definitions, can be contradictory. The family of the autistic individual must learn to cope with the individual's tendency to take words literally. Problems become easier once they are understood. When the parent or parents realise that their small one is not going to grow up to be normal, then it can be an adventure to watch how that child does grow and mature in his or her own way.

Autistic children do need a lot of freedom to be themselves. In a vast world where the autistic is an alien, all surrounding humans usually expect too much from the unique person. Some people need more seclusion and a life in protection. If an individual can't or won't live like everyone else, she or he is shunned and condemned. Society denies the autistic person's difficulties in social life. Autism is both special ability and disability. If an autistic person can't work a regular job and needs financial help, no matter how intelligent or how severely affected that person is, she or he is put through a barrage of de-humanising experiences by a government that would rather throw disabled people away, or enclose them in hospitals. It is the right of all people, disabled or not, to live comfortably. A government that ignores the homeless also turns eyes from disabled. Many people seem to want to watch an autistic person suffer through a job she or he can't handle, and become overwhelmed by lights, sounds, smells, and by unpredictable co-workers. To say the autistic person must change if he is overwhelmed by assaults to his senses is preposterous. Perhaps instead, he needs a simple, peaceful life with a loving cocoon of friends or family. He is entitled to happiness.

Some people with Autism struggle a lonely, poor life, not assisted by the groups which vow to assist. There are people living in all nations who just can't cope with the way the rest live. So they need their own tailoured lives. They have a right to choose their lives, or to be sheltered by others who know and understand them. It seems those whose parents aren't extremely rich are doomed because nobody else cares.



Money has become a weapon to powerfully wield or to deny rights to those who haven't much. If they can't fight for themselves, who will fight for them?

Autism is not the hell. The hell comes from a lifetime of outsiders who try to force their customs and ideas upon the disabled person, as if to point out that the disabled person has no ideas of her own. Society is the hell when it discriminates and mars uniqueness, and by its actions betrays that it views autistic people as freaks who are less than the rest, who aren't entitled to what the rest are entitled to. Autistic people are thrown away in mind and body, or they are pitied. Those who think they know say how dreadful it must be to have Autism. Not all special people are happy, but not all are unhappy.

To feel encapsulated in your own inner home is a sanctum out of chaos. Autism's enclosed world isn't an automatic prison. It can also be made into a haven. To control this haven, and include in it your own strengths is a lovely experience. Emotional instabilities can come about from being tormented because you're very unusual, but there are also people who have emotional problems and aren't at all autistic. Instead of trying to make the autistic person acceptable to others in order to escape the torments, why not reprimand the tormentors?

People of Autism are judged more than others. They tend to be a puzzle, and their contradictory characteristics need to be understood. Everyone, especially health professionals and teachers, should have some idea what Autism really is, not just know the outdated myths. Most human beings know what blind means, and Downs syndrome, so why not become better educated on Autism? Autism is very complicated, and it does affect all aspects of a person, so it may be difficult to understand, but that's not a sufficient excuse for an educated human to know almost nothing about it. Individuals whose careers are people-oriented, such as doctors, clergy, and judges, should at least have a bit of an understanding of the autistic mind. One never knows when one will come across an autistic person. Kind understanding will lessen harm to both the autistic person and to others involved with him or her.

General people don't even know usually that an autistic person can perhaps drive a car, or that being severely autistic isn't synonymous with being stupid. Many severely autistic people have areas of able or extraordinary gifts and functions. One person can be both "high-functioning" and "low-functioning". These two terms are often mis-used, and "able Autism" is often mis-understood. An autistic who speaks can be severely affected by other aspects of the condition. And an autistic who doesn't talk can be highly intelligent. This is proven by many examples of non-verbal people who suddenly have access to other forms of communication, such as Sign, or writing, or Facilitated Communication. Many of them begin to pour forth lovely, original language, and poems on complex topics. This point is also evidenced by the fact that the author of this essay does not speak.

There is too much emphasis on bringing children OUT of Autism. Rather, try to discover the mysteries of living IN Autism. What is right for one human isn't always right for another, so it's quite important to get to know intimately the autistic one in your family. It is very wrong to guess about feelings and thoughts of one who doesn't communicate as fully as someone else. The autistic one has feelings (sometimes passionate), and desires, and fears, and questions, as others have. There probably are even more of those than have others,



since the autistic is usually quite puzzled or astounded by the actions of the people around her or him. To appreciate autistic qualities in somebody is to grow closer to that person through gentle acceptance. To show interest in how that person experiences and thinks is to acknowledge that being as a precious individual. This is what all special people need.

If parents praise their so-called normal children for wee tasks and discoveries, why can't they also show excitement for the autistic child, who despite isolation, is also quite sensitive, and instantly knows when he isn't highly thought of? Parents should be proud of their autistic children. Savant abilities can be fascinating. As not all autistics are savants, there can be other qualities to be proud of because there is a distinct personality in each autistic person. Take pride in the child for who he or she truly is, rather than only when he or she performs as others dictate.

Some people just don't have a burning to be like others. To provide an autistic child with a structured education and a secure, loving home will make him feel free to be himself. Then he will understand in his own way that he is cared for, loved, appreciated.

Autistics will be on the outskirts always in some way. Many of these shy, sensitive souls like living within themselves. In the examples of autistic artists, they naturally have the sensory experiences necessary to create rich, creative, original pieces in music, painting, sculpture, and poetry. Creativity is evident in many forms. It is not defined by narrow terms.

To live in touch with your deepest part is also a spiritual happening. It is also a characteristic of Autism that is very lovely. It is wonderful to feel safe in your inside-you home. That security is real, and it provides fortitude. When adversity threatens, the strength from within works to help focus and get through the storm. Many autistic people are very strong-willed, as well as very honest. High intelligence is often manifest in single-minded focus. Autistic people most likely have intelligences that aren't tapped.

All of that can work with a person in unhappy situations. It's not a crime for an autistic person not to comprehend the other world outside. Authority tries to convert the autistic one into what others are. At the core, that's impossible, since Autism is a literal brain difference. What is worse is authority trying to shame the autistic one into making him dislike himself. That is a form of abuse. Authority needs to reform itself into believing that people will be as they are, and that difference can be neat.

Any self-abusive or clearly negative aspects of Autism can be worked through, as long as the rest is celebrated. There is actually much more good than bad. Plus, the definition of good and bad is an opinion.

Consider much worse negative characteristics of other people such as rapists or murderers. Think of Hitler who exemplified qualities of evil and pure hatred. An autistic isn't trying to be a source of anguish to anyone. Even when an autistic child or grown up is in the centre of a wild tantrum, she is not being evil.

Many texts on Autism, as well as some parent and therapist reports, speak of these children as though they are plagues whose purpose is to destroy their families' lives. That attitude, not the phenomenon of Autism, is destructive.

Throughout eras of history, autistic souls were treated as though they were hideously evil. Even in the present time, some are still



existing, forsaken in institutions where vicious experiments upon them, and this is known and hidden by the governments of so-called civilised nations. The clusters of autistic characteristics of behaviour are indeed unusual and do stand out. I, as a girl with Autism, prefer to view these as my own badge of individuality. I don't care what others think. I don't set about to harm anybody. If others have a problem with the real me, than I refuse to compromise myself to lessen myself to please them. They're not going to change to please me. Why should I change to please them?

Children are not born to please parents. Neither are they born to fulfill parents' un-fulfilled dreams. Children aren't projections of their families. In Autism, people complain of the child as afflicted and bringing shame to the family. It's seen as a tragedy that the child will never be what the parents thought he or she would be. Autism is a special personality whose occurrence is nobody's fault. In blaming the child for not being able to become what the parents couldn't become themselves is only an excuse. No one but the parent is to blame for that parent not reaching for a dream or desire, especially an innocent young child. Of course it's okay to feel sad to learn that your child is so very different, and will perhaps be unable to do what others do. But, beyond that sadness can lie new adventures. Life has taken a fresh path that wasn't expected. Autism can be a way of challenging materialistic values where people are judged by their careers and university degrees. Autism goes beyond that. If an autistic young adult never becomes successful in an important career, so what?

I've read of some parents who have left their guilt and rage and denial behind, and now they truly accept their special child and even have joyful relationships with them. Autism can be seen as either a curse or a blessing. It is most crucial that the autistic one himself or herself feel content.

People who are deaf and communicate is Sign often feel a special identity with one another. The deaf have a distinct culture and language, separate but equal to the rest. Many have created communities of living. They are proof that speech isn't necessarily the best form of language. Non-verbal autistic people can find their own type of communication which suits them best. They need freedom to choose and have control over some things in their lives. As in the culture of the deaf, unique lifestyle is celebrated. This can work with autistic people. There are less autistic people than deaf people, yet they have as much right to feel joyous in life and to live free of endless ridicule. To claim many are too retarded to comprehend or desire this is a miserable excuse and a lie.

They do live in their own special worlds, and those inner islands can be rich and exciting. Nobody on the outside has the right to judge another's peaceful way of life as wrong. I'm not talking of mass murderers, whose way of life destroys others. I'm talking of a special type of person cast out only for being different.

People need to look more than with only eyes. They must feel with hearts, not only fingers. They must take the time to grow close to the autistic one so only then can they decide if that special person's life is so terrible it must be altered.

Others could learn much from an autistic person's innocent, pure way of seeing things. I believe that Autism is an unspoilt version of humanity, full of true un-refined emotions and so many mysteries.

If people can accept mysteries in their religions, why can't they accept mysteries present in one another? If they can accept people of different colours and nations, then hopefully someday they can accept autistic people as separate but equal.



# Marc Segar

is an able young autistic man who believes that information and thinking are the keys to overcoming autism.

## Questions I get asked

What does it feel like to be autistic?

Are you glad you went to special school?

In what ways do you still suffer from autism?

What's your special talent?

## Beliefs

It is my understanding of my disability which has enabled me to overcome it.

I have often perceived autism to be intuition deficit but perhaps it is equally valid to call it lateral thinking deficit.

Intuition is the ability to do detective work on a subconscious level and the conclusions manifest themselves in the form of feelings. An autistic person's feelings are more influenced by other things such as shapes, sounds and their own rituals and fixations.

It is difficult for autistic people to filter out the relevant information from the trivial because we have difficulty in retaining both **plot** (information which strings together) and **oddness** (information which doesn't connect with any other information). However, we are better at retaining **detail** which is half way between plot and oddness.

We almost inevitably suffer from "sheltered upbringing" in our late teens and onwards. This, combined with our incapacity for picking up on any form of deception or truth distortion can lead to extreme embarrassment and humiliation. However, access to the correct information can work wonders.

Autism is **mis-understood** by its very nature.

## **Myths and mis-conceptions**

It is a myth that all autistic people avoid eye contact. The real problem is knowing when to give eye contact and when not to.

It is a myth that all autistic people dislike physical contact. In actual fact, they can sometimes be hyper-affectionate but in unusual ways e.g. the child who likes to take someone's arm and rub it on their cheek. The problem for autistic adults is the sheer complexity of knowing when it is or isn't appropriate to get close to someone. Consequently, they may decide to withdraw altogether because it makes life simpler.

It is a myth that all autistic people are socially withdrawn. Some of us try extremely hard simply to be liked by others. Some of us can be extremely articulate but simply not know what to talk about and what not to talk about. Some of us decide we prefer computers, maps or trains to people simply because we find them easier to work with.

## **Aims**

To pass on my information in whatever form I feel is most practical or relevant.

To explain things in simple terms.

To listen to other peoples ideas as well.

If you would like to know more please contact Marc Segar on 0181-886-0786.

Please could people phone during the first half of the week because it is on Thursdays and Fridays that people book me for children's parties over the weekend.



# Beyond childhood: some notes on a hidden disability

by Andrew Walker

**The problem** for me is that it is often very hard work to have meaningful interactions with others. I believe that the root cause of this difficulty is because I do not have a natural or instinctive 'feel' for what is socially acceptable. This apparent outward lack of empathy is manifest both in how I present myself and how I interpret the behaviour of other people. This inevitably leads to misunderstandings in both myself and others. Though I have found that it is possible to understand and learn 'by rote' what is expected of me, I have to an extent become a victim of my own success because my social *faux pas*, though having become reduced in both frequency and magnitude, may paradoxically cause more offence because of their greater apparent subtlety and thus implication. Despite being registered as disabled (with the Dept. for Education and Employment), many people have difficulty in accepting my condition because I appear 'so normal', preferring instead to believe that I have 'an attitude problem'. I also have great difficulty, in comparison with other people, in successfully concentrating on things in which I do not have an intrinsic interest. This has resulted in some rather inconsistent and depressing performances in time-constrained written examinations. I have usually only succeeded in academic pursuits because of the compensating effect of the high marks gained through assessment by other methods. **All of these problems inevitably lead to anxiety, stress, and physical breakdown.**

**Despite this** apparent handicap I have had several long-lasting relationships including marriage. Some people even find my apparent social naiveté and sometimes inappropriately optimistic demeanour to be an attractive attribute. Though at times it seems that my rate of progress is only half of that of other people through higher education, I do still regard this as progress. I have every intention of continuing to PhD level where I will be significantly less disadvantaged and discriminated against because there are no written exams and deadlines are more flexible.

**The solution** may lie in Asperger people being able to grasp the fundamental concepts of both self-awareness and awareness of others. To help understand this myself and illustrate it to others, I have developed the 'A posteriori', or logical, cognitive model to show the postulated processes which may be used by Asperger people to facilitate communication at a social level. However, it is important to define a baseline by considering the cognitive functions apparently performed by 'normal' people during ordinary day-to-day socially-oriented interpersonal interactions. My interpretation of 'normalness' in this context is shown in the upper diagram overleaf. Whilst at first sight it may appear a little complex, it is important only to note two things, that several jobs can be performed concurrently, or 'in parallel' in computer jargon, and that messages are filtered and evaluated for social significance instinctively within an extensive interface. This means that non-Asperger people can register body language cues and read between the lines of a conversation at the same time. However, it is also worth noting that experience and logical processes must also pass through this apparently subjective social filter at least once. The lower diagram shows the consciously constructed cognitive mechanism, shown in white, overlying an essentially simple but logical process, which may be used by Asperger people to cope with social cues. The important points to note are that the social interface filter is essentially absent, that only one thing can be concentrated upon at any one time, i.e. 'serially', and that the social mechanism will become more competent over time with accumulated experience. A fundamental flaw will always remain because the social mechanism adaptation is not instinctive but is a conscious process requiring effort and is therefore subject to fatigue and delays like any other biological function if exposed to excessive usage. This theory is supported by similar cognitive mechanisms which have been conceived independently by other Asperger family people (e.g. Madar, 1996; Williams, 1996) whom are characteristically objective about themselves (Wolff, 1995).

**The prognosis** in the long term may be very good. Early diagnosis an absolute prerequisite to the Asperger individual getting the chance to realise his or her potential. Much also depends upon other people with whom they come into contact, i.e. decision makers, that they are aware of this condition especially at key points of Asperger persons life paths. Having acknowledged these 'limitations', there is evidence to suggest that many Asperger people have special gifts which, if allowed to develop, may be of significant benefit to society.

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## AUTISM

### BATTLING TO CONFORM TO MODERN SOCIETY'S DEMANDS

12TH AUGUST 1996

If you think about all the demanding roles of a responsible adult in modern society, the list is endless! Getting your qualifications, being adequately trained with enough experience to further an interesting career, getting a suitable job and holding it down, being able to clothe, feed and accommodate oneself - in other words - the different aspects of life in order to live respectably and comfortably and earn the respect of others too.

Well for an autistic person, particularly one of the high-functioning asperger syndrome kind, I may appear to you as being articulate, well dressed and well spoken as well as appearing to be very able indeed, people find this impression misleading, especially when I see problems where most would take them more in their stride. coupled with the frustration of having to convince people there IS a disability at all. No problem if you can provide proof of this in the form of a green card, but if you are introducing yourself to a potential employer for the very first time, it is very much a case of make or break, I'm afraid. This is particularly the case if you have problems in the workplace and the others, despite trying to explain your difficulties, seem to expect you to perform as quickly and as efficiently as everybody else. The idea that you have to prove, when applying for a job and if you get one, that you are just as capable of learning how to do the job as well as other people and you are just as good as the rest, only considerably slower!

I have encountered problems with the family in early years, as a result of my condition not being diagnosed until much later on. The only way I could communicate then was by drawing! That was until I could manage to master the English Language to an adequate degree, enough to communicate on a broader, more acceptable level

I have encountered problems at school, being teased and bullied by other children, being shouted at by the teachers in a rather nasty and sarcastic way. I felt that I could not learn very much as a result of lack of support, understanding and respect.

I encountered problems on training courses as a result of ignorance, lack of understanding, support and respect.

I encountered problems in my last paid job as a result of ignorance, lack of support and understanding as well as a lack of patience and degree of adequate respect.

I encountered prejudice at Church as a result of fear and superstition as well as suspicion and a lack of understanding. People throughout the ages, particularly in the church seem to back away from things they don't understand and blame the people who are suffering from the condition in which they are afraid. It is said in Scripture "Perfect love casts out all fear; for fear has to do with torment". As a result of people's fear, superstition and ignorance, I have found this very difficult to believe.

The only people who have made a serious step into understanding the condition of Asperger syndrome have been my friends in The Sealed Knot, Society of Cavalier's & Roundheads (Re enactment of The English Civil War between 1642 - 1651), and my friends in The White Lion Pub up the road from where I live, my friendly local in more ways than one! Friends of the family as well as family and relatives have also learnt to make allowances for me and have come to accept me for who I am rather than what I am.

I am training on a West Midlands Access Federation Course in Multi Media studies in computer graphics with Handsworth College, based at St Thomas's Network Dudley.

I will prove to others that I am determined to succeed, whatever the cost!

MATTHEW GRIFFIN

## My life as a sufferer of Asperger autism

By Diane Webster

It has only been a year since I was diagnosed as having Asperger autism. My mother is a teacher at a college and she was talking to a tutor about her autistic daughter. It suddenly dawned on my mother that a lot of the symptoms the lady was describing were parallel to my own characteristics - characteristics which my family thought of as 'unusual'. I was always a loner at school and I would be in a 'world of my own' for a while.

Mum gave me a gin and tonic one evening and she also had a glass and said, "That's yours on the left." I picked up the glass on the right and, curious, mum said, "You get your left and your right mixed up, don't you? I don't know how to tell you this, but I think you're autistic."

Of course, it was a bit of a shock, but it was actually a relief. I knew that there was a possible explanation for the things I did that wouldn't make sense. However, I understood the name autistic to mean mentally handicapped and I worried how others would react to me.

My mother and I went to see a Professor Corbett of the Birmingham University, who spent a whole afternoon with us, delving deep into my past and it was decided that I have Asperger autism. At the time, we thought it was just autism but then it was diagnosed as Asperger's.

For some time, I felt as if my family were lowering their expectations of me, once realising I had this condition. I would vacuum the car with the attachments and as I opened the car door, mum would come out and say, "Now do you know how this.... I'll show you" - impatient, I would retort that I obviously did know - the family had seen me use the attachments on the stairs inside many many times and I thought they were treating me as if I was a child or as someone with little brain stimulation. To a certain degree, I still feel this, for instance, when I do the ironing, I will be offered simple things like tea-towels, hankies or shirts, but perish the thought of me ironing more complicated things like trousers! I am actually capable of doing these well, but nerves about the possible burning of these articles are evident (and the nerves don't come from me, either!).

Certain problems with day-to-day living are approached with more understanding, now that I have had my diagnosis. Getting frazzled whilst searching for my change on the bus, for instance, used to really worry me - I knew I had the right change in my hand, but painstakingly counting it out, my hands shaking slightly, and imagining that the passengers were impatient with me - but now, I still get nervous, but understand that this is part of my condition and can control the nervousness.

My family are very understanding - I think it is a relief, because mum couldn't understand why I am slow at things like housework, or forget to post letters and pay bills but now she is more patient.



We must realise, that having Asperger autism can have its advantages. We have the ability to remember details with an incredible long term memory. In our school reports, we will often have the comment, 'has good imagination', and this should help build our confidence and self-esteem. I have entered a short story competition, from a major bookstore, and the winner has their story published with copyright. The family are most impressed with the story and say it really does read like a novel. The imagination that we Aspergers have can really come out in artistic ways, in poems, songs or stories. It would be nice to win!

My employers are very understanding about my condition. I had a 'heart-to-heart' with my two bosses, when I was finding it difficult to cope with the workload and getting basically flustered and panicky, especially if I couldn't find something. I didn't actually expect to keep the job, because I didn't know they were going to be so understanding! It shocked me when they suggested getting wire baskets for in-going and out-going typing and creating typing request slips! They were going to keep me!

My advice is to anyone with Asperger autism, that it's not just others that need to be patient with you, but **you** have to patient with **yourself**. Give yourself a 'pat on the back' for your achievements and organise yourself, such as having a cork message board around the place, where you can pin reminders on them. Write things down and don't get bothered if people see you as being silly for writing things down. Remember, don't apologise for having Asperger's or your behaviour. I do still tend to do this sometimes, but realised that if you draw attention to your mistake, then it may stir up a hornet's nest. Perhaps you can 'laugh off the error' instead of saying (and this is common with lots of autistic/Asperger's) "Oh bother, stupid me!" If everyone got uptight and slapped their forehead or stamped their feet at their own mistake then it would be a pretty tense, taut world! I know I do tend to call myself a stupid idiot when I happen to drop something on the ground, like a piece of paper or some paper clips. Everyone drops something at some stage. When I suggest an alternative to you, I am, helping myself, believe me!

There is hope for those of us with Asperger's. Professor Corbett said that one can improve over time. When I attended the Bristol conference, one of the problems with Asperger's that was mentioned was the inability to maintain a serious relationship with the opposite sex. It gives me great pleasure to say that I have a wonderful boyfriend, a real gentleman, who has been with me through thick and thin, for ten months (this is a record for me!). I thought he may not understand my Asperger's but he is reading lots of material on the subject and loves me despite the problems. Sure, he didn't understand why I forgot to write to him or phone him (my mother prompts me to phone him, but it seemed I only phone him to confirm train details to visit him in London) but once I told him it was okay. Now, I'm writing more and phoning more, without prompting in both cases.

So please, take courage. Writing down how you are going to cook a simple meal, and using a timer for different vegetables or meat, can really help to be calm in the kitchen. Making sure your clothes are ready for the next day - the previous night, is another way forward, so the next day, you are prepared. A to-do list is also helpful. I hope this article gives you the confidence and encouragement, that **you are not alone** and **you can cope!**



## **Asperger Syndrome**

**by Simon Beddow**

Asperger Syndrome is a mild form of autism, unlike other disabilities it is not noticeable as someone who is severely physically or mentally handicapped.

People with Asperger Syndrome are often intelligent but find problems in socialising, mixing at parties or at work. Such things as catching a train or changing at the next station appear to be a major ordeal for people with Asperger Syndrome. Unless they are given clear instructions on how to do it. They tend to develop anxieties and fears of certain situations, their behaviour to those who do not have Asperger syndrome may appear to be anti-social or odd. However they can make a positive contribution (particularly in the workplace) if their disability is properly understood and are helped in a positive way.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **4) Short Stories**

- a) 'Dali's Dilemma'  
by Steve Ridout
- b) 'Beyond Reality'  
by Thomas Simmons

## Dali's Dilemma

By Steve Ridout

There wasn't really enough time in which to accomplish all this, but nevertheless Salvo emerged again out into the daylight, he was in Trafalgar Square. The pigeons looked grey and bedraggled on the wet pavement but flurried into flapping heaps and carved around the skies above him as he strode.... A light autumn wind blew, flapping soppy leaves or were they dirty bits of paper.. It was a most depressing wind that bore a rain that you couldn't see, but which nevertheless managed to soak you thoroughly. As Salvo walked, the mighty tuba leaching heat from his hands, he became aware of a most peculiar sound. A kind of high breathy keening. He stopped. The keening dropped in tone but still continued. It was a very strange sound. Close and yet distant simultaneously....

He walked on, straining to catch and recognise the sounds. Wet benches and tables outside pubs caught his legs, so he sat down and unzipped his tuba case. His heart missed a beat as he blew into the mouthpiece; a small, tentative breath, and to his astonishment a sonorous blare emerged.

Aha, he thought.. the Twilight Zone Good God.

"Tut tut. I don't like blasphemy." Salvo froze. The words had absolutely definitely issued from the tuba in his hand. But perish the thought.

"I think I'm going crazy", said Salvo to no-one in particular.

"Hrrmmm. I can't comment on that." Again the sound had only one possible source. To make sure, Salvo looked around him, hoping perhaps to see a ventriloquist busking in the Square. Surrealism isn't dead, he thought; it's all around us: we only have to pluck it out of the air. People don't think enough deep thoughts nowadays... His tuba again erupted into sound.

"Tubby the Tuba I'm not," he protested and a little man shuffled off. I know I've had a few vodkas at our office party in the City, but that's no excuse for these strange sounds coming from this deranged tuba... you can't tell your friends about your predicament; they'll think you've lost your marbles.. but that's ok... you can play a tuba without marbles. Though by far the most interesting effect is produced by filling your cheeks with marbles and, by blowing hard, forcing them through the small aperture of the mouthpiece and then when they are through, juggling them in a small cascade or fountain in the bell of the instrument. If you use luminous marbles this produces a very pretty effect at night. You can also use tennis balls for this purpose, but they're harder to blow through the mouthpiece...

At that moment, a tortoise parachuted in, landing neatly in the centre of the Square. I don't know why I mention it, tortoises always were dropping into the Square. I suppose it was the fountains that attracted them.

One of the parachuting tortoises landed in the bell of the tuba, looked up at Salvo, after disentangling himself from his parachute, and said: "It's a funny old world, isn't it? Don't you think Salvo? Here I am and there are you there's your tuba..."

"Thanks a lot, but I'm my own tuba", interrupted the tuba.

"and it's Christmas", continued the tortoise. "So let's go busking. I can dance real well, otherwise why are we all here? Know what I mean, Salvo?" Salvo didn't, but the tortoise and the tuba did, so off they went hand in glove, or words to that effect, to join the crowds who were busy celebrating something that none of them really understood the purpose of any more; an old tradition, the creaking of collapsing values.

"I'm all for uncertainty," said Salvo "It's the one thing you can rely on in this life" And so he scotch-hopped a few paving stones past the crib, past Father Christmas and past the Norwegians' annual Christmas present to the populace of Britain to where some people were demonstrating outside South Africa House.

"Free Nelson Mandela," he joined in and then glanced up to where the one-eyed Nelson, telescope tucked under his arm, has turned and was looking down at him with his one good eye.

"Free yourself mate", replied Nelson.

"I guess it's about time", responded Salvo. He turned, intending to leave in another direction and saw Santa's sister walking towards him. She was hand-in-hand with a beautiful saxophone.

"Straight out of a Walt Disney cartoon", breathed Salvo. And together the three of them walked off down Whitehall into the sunset and Buckingham Palace.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Beyond Reality**

**By Thomas Simmons**

Thomas was running through a dark forest. The pale moonlight filtering through the leaves and branches cast dark, eerie shadows around him, and the snapping of twigs underfoot seemed to echo around the entire forest. There were no sounds around him, and the snapping twigs and his own breathing seemed to be the loudest noises in the whole forest. he could not see anything except trees, but his imagination and fear made lurking creatures appear in the shadows at the edge of his vision.

Even after all this time, Thomas was still running just as fast. It was very close now. He could not see it, but he could sense it's presence. It would not be long now.

Suddenly Thomas stopped. He had arrived. He was in a small clearing, somewhere near the middle of the forest. In the centre of the clearing was a huge obsidian pedestal, stretching up higher than the trees themselves, glowing with an unearthly green aura.

The creature was almost upon him now, but Thomas did not run, he merely stood in the shadow of the pedestal, staring at it with awe. Almost beyond his control, his hand reached out to touch it, just as the creature entered the clearing.



It was a huge wolf, with fur as black as the night itself. Looking into its eyes was like looking into the face of evil. But Thomas wasn't looking. He was completely unaware of its presence. The wolf snarled in anger, and leapt at Thomas, just as his hand touched the pedestal....

Beebeebleep!

The beeping alarm clock woke Thomas from his dream. He had been having the same dream every night for the last week, and it was very strange. The alarm clock always woke him at the same point. He had tried putting it forward an hour, but it still woke him at exactly the same time.

Thomas managed to half-open his eyes, and glance over at the clock. 09:30. He had set his alarm for 10:00. Still, it's nothing worth worrying about, he thought.

Beebeebleep!

Stupid alarm, he thought as he pressed the 'CANCEL' button, can't you just leave me alone for half an hour?

Beebeebleep!

Thomas was getting annoyed now. He pressed the 'CANCEL' button hard, almost knocking the alarm clock off the top of the cabinet.

Beebeebleep!

Resisting the temptation to hurl the alarm clock against the wall, Thomas pressed the 'CANCEL' button several more times, then eventually forced himself out of bed and yanked on the power lead.

The plug refused to budge.

It's going to be one of those days, he thought as he pulled even harder. Finally the plug came out of the socket, flew across the room, and crashed into Thomas' carefully sorted and stacked pile of disks at the other end of the room, scattering them all over the floor.

He glanced over at his calendar, checking that it wasn't Friday 13 today, before grabbing one of the disks off the floor and walking angrily out of the door.

After getting dressed, and leaving his pyjamas strewn across the floor (just like his parents had told him not to), he wandered into the living room. As soon as he opened the door, Rosy (one of his three cats) ran up to him.

"Hello Rosy" he said. "Mmmmyow!" replied Rosy, who promptly ran past him, and raced upstairs. Thomas decided that it definitely was one of those days, before going into the kitchen to pour himself a bowl of cornflakes.

The single remaining flake fell out of the box, bounced off the edge of his bowl, and fell into the bin.

Thomas abandoned his breakfast, and walked over to his computer. He turned it on, inserted the disk he had brought from upstairs, and typed:

**\*filer\_run !moria**

After a short delay, and several clunks from the disk drive, the title screen appeared:

## **THE DUNGEONS OF MORIA AN INTERACTIVE ADVENTURE**

**[ Press space to start or R to restore a saved game ]**

Thomas pressed the 'R' key, and after another delay, and several more clunks, the game started:

**You are in the inner sanctum of Morgoth, Lord of Darkness. The entire room is filled with benches and shelves, covered in potions, scrolls, spellbooks and other strange objects. Morgoth stands in a corner, reading a spellbook. He does not seem to have noticed you.**

**What now?**

Everything's OK so far, he thought. With an evil grin he typed:

**throw sceptre at Morgoth**

The game responded with:

**As the Sceptre of Light hits Morgoth it explodes, sending beams of light flying in all directions. Morgoth screams in agony as the light envelops him.**

Heh heh heh, Thomas thought, this is fun. But then something strange happened:

**Morgoth looks at you and says "You haven't beaten me yet! I will have my revenge..."**

Has someone been messing about with my game, thought Thomas angrily. Suddenly, the screen began to glow, just a little at first, but soon it was a dazzling red light. Thomas found himself unable to look away....

As abruptly as the light had started, it quickly diminished. The monitor was dark again. If Thomas was still there, he would probably have run away.

But the room was empty.



## 5) Letters to the Editor

### **Letter from David Miedzianik (say Med-Gen-Nick)**

Dear Asperger United

I'm just writing to say, that my new book of poetry 'Now All I've Got Left Is Myself' costs £8 from The Information Service, The Early Years Centre, 272 Longdale Lane, Ravenshead, Nottinghamshire, NG15 9AH. The costs cover postage, and packing I think. It's not bad value, as I think it's over 100 leaves long. By the way people can get my other poetry book, 'Taking The Load Off My Mind', by sending £7 to, The Early Years Centre. My Autobiography cost £7, from The Early Years Centre too. All prices include postage and packing.

Another thing is, can someone reading Asperger United take me out on a date or something, as I'm 40 years old and still single. I don't have any dates with lasses because I'm autistic. I have my own 3 bedroomed house. I also have a big garden attached to the house. I don't have a job. So all I do is sit and write my books. I do this in place of a job you see. Anyway, here in Rotherham there's only rubbish things for autistic people like me. I'm better off writing my books than doing something dead rubbish anyway. Anyway I hope you'll all write off for my books. I think that's about all. So bye bye for now.

Yours hopefully

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Letter from David Wright**

I am currently studying at college Media Studies 'O' level. In order to complete this matter I would like to hear from Autistics the following information:-

- 1) What is Aspergers?
- 2) How does it affect you?
- 3) How does it affect your everyday life ie shopping, dealing with money, other people and communicating?
- 4) Very roughly how many people are affected?
- 5) Are you born with it?
- 6) Do you like going to college or school?
- 7) What kind of life do you feel you lead ie can you have a job?
- 8) Are different people affected in different ways?
- 9) Are there any people with Aspergers who have children?
- 10) Is it an illness?
- 11) How do you think your image of Aspergers is your life and times?
- 12) No question should be asked of anyone who is not happy with it?

I point these matters to make it clear to you. I would like honest straight insights for an 'O' level course in Media 1st and 2nd year not some rude article rubbishing someone. It would be nice to have people write to me with their real thoughts and feelings. I would say here any letter will be dealt with carefully.

## **Editors reply**

Dear David Wright

Thank you for your letter. Hopefully you will find the answers you wanted in the 'Essays on Autism section'.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Please note** – In order to ensure the privacy of contributors to Asperger United full addresses will not be printed. If you would like to reply to any of the letters or requests for contacts please write to:

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

We will pass your letters on to the appropriate person.



## **6) Asperger Network**

### **International**

#### **Letter from Jasmine Lee O'Neill – PENNSYLVANIA**

Hello, I am a 27 year old bright autistic girl living in the United States. I have traits of Asperger syndrome, along with being fairly severely classically autistic.

I am English-Irish, and my dream is to come to live in England, probably the London area. My doctor and dear friend is Bertram Ruttenberg of Philadelphia.

I don't speak, but I write poems and essays, draw and am involved in music. I love being autistic and have been blessed with many gifts. I use these gifts in my own shy, private ways, to spread the news on autism, and help to defend autistic little children. I need to do it in an indirect way. I'm not the type to go about giving speeches like Temple Grandin or Donna Williams do, and their ways to teach others are wonderful, just not me.

I have no job. I try to get federal disability benefits. Fellow autistics may contact me through the newsletter.

Peace. Jasmine

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **Letter from Dominique Blickenstorfer – ZURICH**

Problems Associated with high Intellectual Autistic Individuals.

I am a young man of 28 years. Amongst the interests 'philosophy, religions, history, theory of electrotechnics-electronics', the last is dominating. On one side, this fixations/particular intellectual interests don't allow a normal formation of the last subject (university studies etc) Because I occupy myself of these problems I am searching persons with similar interests. Autistic persons which are interested on one or several of those themes please can contact Dominique by letter or fax.

Dominique has left his fax number if you wish us to pass on messages.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Letter from Hanna Christiansen – NORWAY**

Hello! Is there anyone out there who would like to write to me? I'm a girl of 25 years with high-functioning autism; and I would like to get in touch with other people in the same situation.

My main interests include: animals (particularly horses), nature, the sea, geography, foreign languages, spatial puzzles...

If anyone is interested in exchanging letters with me please write to me c/o Asperger United.

### **Editor's reply**

Thank you Jasmine, Dominique and Hanna for your letters and for your poems and essay which we have published in the talent section. Let us know about life in Pennsylvania/Zurich/Norway and how you cope with your autism.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **National**

#### **Jonathan Havard, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD**

Hi, my name is Jonathan. I am 28 years old and I have been diagnosed as having Asperger syndrome. My home is in Hemel Hempstead, about ½ an hour north of London in Hertfordshire and I would like to hear from and meet anyone interested in playing snooker, photography, going to see pop concerts and I travel a lot to see my favourite artists.

I should also like to go on holiday this year, perhaps to Cornwall.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **Robin Oliver, LONDON**

My name is Robin Oliver and I am 47 and male and have Asperger syndrome (I was diagnosed last year). I would like to meet new friends of either sex and any age or place of residence. Interests include needlework, theatre (I am a 'Friend of Shakespeare's Globe'), history (including historical places and historical novels), countryside, conservation, indoor games, coins, reading, philosophy, spirituality, listening to classical music, flower shows.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **Anna Cohen, BARNET**

Hi everyone. My name is Anna Cohen and I'm now 22 years. Some of you may remember me. I used to see some of you at Maudsley Hospital when I was younger, after I was first diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. I was also the person who named this magazine, *Asperger United*.

Now for a bit of my news. My younger sister has just passed her driving test and has bought a new car, a Nissan Micra. Last week I went to the cinema and saw a new film out called *Ransom*, which is about a boy kidnapped to be held for ransom. I also went on an exciting walk recently called 'Jack the Ripper's London.' It was a guided walk about Jack the Ripper's reign of terror in London. It was really fascinating. Anyway, I better go now.



PS Richard Littlewood if you are out there, please write to me or Russell as I've lost your address and phone number. Thanks again for the Christmas card.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Graham Giles, LISKEARD, CORNWALL**

I read with some interest the letter you published by David Miedzianik of Rotherham, concerning his wish for contacts, and I was wondering if you might do the same for me? I am 38 years old and also have Asperger syndrome and feel I have learnt a lot from the 36 years I have been struggling with my condition.

I am a combined honours graduate in psychology and pure mathematics, but I am finding it hard to find employment; when I do work, I do odds and ends for the publishing industry (proofreading, copyediting etc). I have recently bought a computer and believe that this will open doors for me, such as the ability to communicate with other autistic people on the Internet eventually. I live on my own and find social contacts difficult, especially with the opposite sex (I have yet to have a girlfriend), but I have a very keen sense of humour and am generally sensitive and considerate of other people's thoughts and feelings (when I am able to read these properly!)

If your newsletter is still going strong, I should be very grateful if you would publish this. I would welcome any letters from other people with similar problems and will try to answer all such, though like David I am especially interested in hearing from females. My hobbies include astronomy (though I also believe in astrology – I'm a Pisces!), crosswords, mathematics, seabird watching, watercolour painting (lapsed I'm afraid), Methodist local history, computing and the occasional visit to the pub.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Robin Wraight, aged 46, YORK**

I am a southerner trying to find a suitable place to live back south where I could use my mixture of south-based abilities and interests in either a voluntary or paid capacity.

I am a train enthusiast (in bright clothes .. not a trainspotter in a grotty anorak) and could be a people or things by train courier, London Travelcards and GWR are my speciality. Could go elsewhere.

Also I make models based on SE England timber framed buildings and Somerset/Shropshire/Old Red Sandstone rocky outcrops, 00 gauge model railway scale. My source materials are pulped newspaper, PVA glue and different coloured matchpots of emulsion paints. It's great fun shading from one strong colour to another in 15-20 mixes.

And I love the rhythms and harmonies of Riverdance.. and Intercity 125 trains as well.

**From the Editor**

Dear Robin, Thank you for your letter. Sorry it has taken so long to publish. Could you send us a photograph of your models for our talent section. They sound wonderful!

**Stephen McCarthy, ROMFORD, ESSEX**

Hello, my name is Stephen. I was one of the people who suggested a new design logo. I'm writing in now wondering if any one is into or in the music biz as I have some demos of very commercial songs. They were written by myself. I have been praised by a Radio One DJ and a number one band manager. I'm looking for a lucky break, exposure and hopefully then a contract on my songs or as a songwriter. I am singularly very good. Also, I would be pleased to hear from anyone who has any ideas or would simply like to pursue anything further.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Peter French, CLACTON-ON-SEA, ESSEX**

My name is Peter French and I have recently found out I have Asperger syndrome. I am 39 years old and live with my parents in Clacton-on-Sea. I am looking for friends/pen friends, male or female. My interests are reading, Scrabble, listening to music, especially from the 1960s, cycling and natural history, also computing. I am a vegetarian. Is there anyone out there who would like to write?

\* \* \* \* \*

**Owen Stevens, TENTERDEN, KENT**

Hello, my name is Owen. I am 24 years old and live in Tenterden, Kent. I am doing work experience at Tesco's. I like working there because there are ladies there at Tesco's. I do the cardboard round there.

I have some hobbies that I like doing, they are being a DJ and tennis and snooker and darts and young ladies and watching *Home and Away* and watching *Neighbours*. I would like to go out with two young ladies at the same time. I would like to go out with someone who looks like Celine Dion and Mariah Carey and Angel, Michelle George and Steffi Graff and Shampoo and Tiffany out of Eastenders.

Can you please write back to me. Can you send a picture of you. I play on my own DJ show, I play Bluetones, *Marblehead*, Johnson and Phil Collins, *Dance into the Night*, Celine Dion, *Because you Love Me*, Slade, *Come on feel the noise*, Spice Girls, *Wannabe*, The Jam, *Going Underground*, Eternal, *O Babe*.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Susanne Warren, BEDFORD**

Hi, my name is Susanne Warren, I am 28 years old, and was diagnosed as having Asperger syndrome, in November 1995.

When I was diagnosed, I then wrote to The National Autistic Society for information on where I could meet or get in touch with others like myself. They sent me a copy of the *Asperger United No 4* September 1994, which I read with great interest, when I read Matthew Robinson's life story, it was like my own experiences. I too had great difficulties and behavioural problems at Primary School. I was sent to the Educational Psychologist to try and sort out my behaviour, the result of their findings was, that I was unique, peculiar, socially unacceptable, bizarre, and a diagnostic puzzle (mind you this was 21 years ago, when they did not know about Asperger syndrome). When I was at primary school, the Headmistress was



very good and she employed a classroom assistant to be with me all the time on a one to one basis, as I would disrupt the class, with my behaviour. But like Matthew, my middle school years were even worse than my primary school for bullying and teasing. I was always a loner and didn't make any friends. Like Matthew, my mother and her family have been my friends, and I am very close to my mother although she has gotten on to me many times about making friends and told me many times that it's my fault, I don't try, or make the effort to make friends, but although she knew something was different about me she did not know I had Asperger until she saw a television programme called *QED* and she sent for the information. When she read it she knew that this was my problem, she took the information to the doctor, who referred me to Dr Howlin, who after reading all my medical records from birth to the present day, and met me, finally diagnosed me.

I have been on YTS schemes, and adult training schemes since the age of 17. The last job I had was eight months ago, when I was a VDU clerk, a position I held for five years, until the behaviour of my work colleagues, teasing and lack of understanding became too much, so I left and refused to go back.

Since I have been diagnosed, I am getting a lot of help, from the assessment and development team, also help to claim the benefits that I am entitled to, also I am going to have an advocate who will become a friend to me, and I have a care worker to help me with things I don't understand. I am also hoping that at some point this year, I will be getting a place of my own, to see if I can copy with everyday living, which, with the help of the team, and my family I think I will be able to do. I am also hoping to do an NVQ course in office work, and maybe a cookery course.

I still find it a problem to interact with people on a social level, and still do not have any friends. I do not know if I will ever be able to overcome this problem. I am quite willing to become a pen friend, if possible with girls around my own age. My interests are music, singing, art and cooking.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Leon Powell, MIDDLESEX**

Hello! I am Leon. I was diagnosed as an Asperger person only last month. I am 25 this year and my life has always been confusing, with nothing successful but family and pets. This Asperger business is my final hope! My dream is to find a girl. All my life I have been rejected 100%.

I have just had the *Asperger United* copy and it was very interesting. I have hope of meeting people who are like me through this. This thing is a big addition to my life. I will write to you again with news facts etc, things I think and do. You might like it and put it in the magazine. I have the ultimate different pets and keep stick insects and fish.

I am writing a story about science fiction. The women rule in it. They are like the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park. I paint birds and my many different story characters. I may tell you more when I write again. I have so many fantasies where I am a fish or a goose or a cat. I do love telling people about how I think etc. I am very over honest. I have never had a social life. That's where I need help. Yes, that's it.

**Tom Lee, ABERDEEN**

I am a 35 year old male living in Aberdeen, Scotland. I was diagnosed as having Klinefelter's syndrome in 1978. I am awaiting diagnosis of Fragile X syndrome and possibly Asperger syndrome, but I may not get diagnosed Asperger as there are few doctors here who can diagnose me.

I should like to correspond with males or females in Scotland with Asperger syndrome and any males who also have Fragile X and/or Klinefelter's syndrome, also known as xxy syndrome in the UK.

My interests are photography, writing letters, puzzles/crosswords and mainly aviation (books, mags, photos, airshows etc). I prefer military aircraft to civil.

I am unemployed, seeking work. I live alone in a flat with no animals. I have a very good sense of humour. I look a bit like Phil Cool and Dennis the Menace! I'll reply to all letters written to me. If you live outside Scotland and want to write, that's fine with me.

Thanks

\* \* \* \* \*

**Robert Ferris, LONDON**

My name is Rob and I'm 31 years old. Last August I was diagnosed as having Asperger traits. Despite this, I've attempted to lead as near normal a life as possible. I obtained a degree in Linguistics from University College London in 1989 after a lot of struggles, ie changing my course, nearly dropping out etc. Subsequent to that I was either unemployed or underemployed for a long period of time. I spent six and a half years working for the catering department of The National Film Theatre. My luck changed last year after I was diagnosed since I was able to register with the NAS supported employment scheme. They gave me a work placement in the NAS as an administrative assistant. The placement has gone very successfully and my job has become permanent.

I have had limited success with friendships though. I have three close friends whom I have know for almost five years. However, I am keen to expand my circle of friends. I suppose that I tend to get on best with people who have traits of Asperger syndrome like myself. I have broad social interests, ie going to pubs, restaurants, concerts, films, plays, art galleries and travelling. However, my main interests are visiting historical buildings, rambling and the environment. I am willing to hear from anybody in the Greater London area.

Currently, I am living at home with my mum, but it's not working out too well. My next ambition is to move out of home. If anybody is in a position to rent a room to me, or knows of somebody who has rooms to let, or alternatively, if anybody is seeking flatmates or knows somebody who is seeking flatmates, then I will be most glad to hear from you.

\* \* \* \* \*



## **7) Talent spotting**

### **A gold for Christopher**

Chris White went to St James' Palace in London to receive his Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award. 25 year old Chris, who was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome when he was 19, already has his Bronze and Silver Award but he says Gold is "the most prestigious award in the country."

Chris, from Littlehampton, began work for his Gold Award in 1987 but lost interest. Then when he went to live at Bentham House, a residential supported community, he became a member of the local railway preservation society and realised this could become his skill/hobby for the award.

And to cap his Gold success, Chris has found a job as a postman with the help of a local supported employment agency!

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Dancing Queen rewarded for endeavour**

Ice dancer Ros Blackburn was the proud recipient of the Riddleys Endeavour Shield in October. Ros who has autism won the award for her determination and setting an example to fellow club mates at the Chelmsford Riverside Club.

Margaret Hyde, Managing Editor, at co-sponsor BBC Radio Essex said: "Competition was intense and we had a very strong field on finalists."

### **Reply from the Editor**

Well done Chris and Ros. This proves that having autism or Asperger syndrome need not necessarily be a barrier to success.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Poems from Sue Norris**

I cannot cope  
with incapacity.  
It's stuffed in me.  
I have inadequate services,  
taking my energy  
then helping me,  
making rules so complicated it's impossible.  
It all does not help me not get frustrated.  
The emotive unknown battering I have had  
trying to cope with what is left,  
even if they all do not go together.  
I've had to manage,  
making my life harder and worse  
because of help.  
I got get furious to be able to go on  
living;  
I exhaust myself to be able to survive.

got show  
I can manage.  
People go away  
till I do.  
My autistic ways have preserved me throughout  
in an alien situation  
that does not allow me to be who I am.  
It's not right to force me.

### **Reply from the Editor**

Dear Sue, hopefully some of the essays on autism and the ideas given by Thomas Madar and David Shamash will help you to understand that we all suffer from the same difficulties and feelings as you do. Never give up!

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Poems from David Miedzianik**

#### **Putting my pills up**

Today is the 18th May 1997, and it's a Sunday.  
Sunday never really ever is, much of a fun-day.  
Yesterday I took two, 0.5mg of Haloperidol.  
Or 500 microgram of Haloperidol, as they're now starting to say.  
Well that's what it says on the box.  
I think I'll now continue, to take 2 a day of these.  
As 1 of these one day, and then 2 of the next day, and so on, doesn't seem to be working.  
After all I don't think taking 2 of these will be hurting.

I keep on taking, my pills day after day.  
At present things aren't so bad, as I've got in the house Old Ray.

The Sun keeps on coming out then going in.  
Today Ray has been, watching the video a bit.  
He's been watching, one called Basic Instinct.  
I've been watching, this one a bit too.  
I've also put on, some CDs for Ray.  
Recently I've not bought as many CDs  
Yesterday Ray wanted to buy a video, I told him that our videos won't play in the USA.  
Over there it's a different TV system you see.

I keep on taking my pills, day after day.  
At present things aren't so bad, as I've got in the house Old Ray.

I've given Ray a book, to take back to the USA.  
I got the wrong book, from the book shop you see.  
I've had a quick look, at this book anyway.  
These days I just can't concentrate very well to read.  
Well maybe it's something, for Ray to read on the plane back to the USA.  
As for me I find, I'm more relaxed travelling.  
Maybe if I travelled more, I could keep on my reduced dose.  
My mum used to know I liked travelling, so odd times she'd drive us all to the coast.

I keep on taking my pills, day after day.  
At present things aren't s bad, as I've got in the house Old Ray.

#### **Putting adverts in music magazines**

I put an advert in Kerrang magazine, wanting someone do a song for autism.  
Songs like this need to be written and recorded, you see.  
Although sometimes I hope, this song'd just be for me.  
There's a lot of pop lyrics that don't mean much anymore.  
Pop lyrics can say something, without being a bore.  
People like Bob Dylan, have proved this, many times before.  
To really help people with autism, they'll have to change the law.  
Being autistic can, sometimes be a real bore.

I keep on putting adverts in music magazines about this song.  
I'm worried that if I tried to do this, the words would come out all wrong.

I keep on sticking adverts in Folk Roots, wanting someone to do a song for autism.  
Folk Roots is a good folk music magazine.  
The readers of Folk Roots phone me up, from time to time.  
I don't always know, what's best to say, when I'm on the line.  
I sometimes wonder if sticking these adverts in, isn't a waste of time.  
I sometimes hope that a lass to love me'll phone up sometime.  
All this reminds me of Jez Lowe's song.  
Where he writes about, a lass to love me, hopefully coming along.

I keep on putting adverts in music magazines about this song.  
I'm worried that if I tried to do this, the words would come out all wrong.



I keep on sticking adverts in Mojo, wanting someone to do a song for autism.  
Mojo is a good rock music magazine.  
In this magazine, they write about old groups like The Who and Queen.  
Maybe a song for autism will come one day, from out of the blue.  
When I was a kid I thought Mojoes were small sweets you chew.  
Songs about autism, are much too few.  
There's loads of songs about love.  
Although songs about love, are no good for me, as I have no love life you see.

I keep on putting adverts in music magazines about this song.  
I'm worried that if I tried to do this, the words would come out all wrong.

I keep on sticking adverts in Rock'n Reel, wanting someone to do a song for autism.  
Rock'n Reel is a good folk music newspaper.  
I've met some of the people, that are featured, in this newspaper.  
Quite a few of these people, have been asked to do this song.  
Being autistic, most things, I tell people, come out all wrong.  
This is why I sometimes avoid using the phone.  
Although I stick my phone number in these adverts, so I'll not be alone.  
Let's hope these adverts will get some songs done, then my chances, won't be blown.

I keep on putting adverts in music magazines about this song.  
I'm worried that if I tried to do this, the words would come out all wrong.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **8) Out and about with Ian**

Our editor tells us of his holiday in Paris. Perhaps other people can tell us of holidays they have tried, how they arranged them, what they found difficult and what they enjoyed.

### **Holiday in Paris**

#### **Day one**

Left home at 5.45 am, got into mum's car. Picked up the coach at 6.15 am to get to the Channel Ferry at Dover to Calais. We should have been on at 10 am but as it was icy and snowy on the roads there were hold ups and we eventually got down there to take the 1.30 pm ferry.

Coach finally got on at 2.30 pm and we sailed at 3.10 pm. Could not get a meal at Péronne as everywhere was packed and finally got to the hotel at 11.30pm.

#### **Day two**

Day two – out to see sites by coach; back to hotel, then a meal and out at 10 pm to see the new year in down the Champs Elysées, then back on coach to hotel.

#### **Day three**

Day three – left at 10 am to come home. Stopped on way at the Sacré Cœur church. I did not go in but did go round the artists' quarters and shops. Péronne was a bit packed for eating, so I had a meal on the ferry. It was a very nice holiday and I would go again, but by train which we should have done but with the ferry we had to sail which took a lot longer. The train goes straight to Paris from Ashford Station, Kent. Walk on passengers can go from London Waterloo on Eurostar train, right of Platform 18 to catch the train.

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## **9) New logo**

Well done and thank you to Graeme Lawson for winning our 'Design a new logo' competition. This will be our new look for 1997/98.

Thank you too to Stephen McCarthy and Thomas Simmons for their contributions. We included Stephen's suggestions in the last newsletter. This is what Thomas suggested.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 10) Quiz time

Your international editor, John Joyce, has put together a 'quizz' for you to test yourselves on. Answers on the last page. Can anyone make up a crossword for us?

### **The quizz**

- 1 Which river links Maidstone with the Thames?
- 2 Where does the Thames rise?
- 3 Which river divides W England from S Wales?
- 4 A ruined monastery by the Wye provided the inspiration for a Wordsworth poem. Which one?
- 5 Tintern was a Cistercian abbey, a reformed branch of the Benedictines. Who founded the parent community?
- 6 Benedict was from Umbria. In which country?
- 7 Which Italian writer provided Shakespeare with inspiration?
- 8 A major city in NE Italy was the centre of an elective duchy, which spread along the eastern Adriatic, for 12 centuries. Which city?
- 9 Currently a village in Bosnia is experiencing a spiritual revival as a result of reported apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Which village?
- 10 Until the end of World War I, Bosnia was a part of which empire?

\* \* \* \* \*

## 11) Information

- 1 New group for people with Asperger syndrome in the Doncaster area.  
Anyone interested in further information about this group should contact:  
Pat Housley, c/o Michael Currey, Thorne House Autistic Community, St Nicholas Road, Thorne, Doncaster, DN8 5BG
- 2 **Coming soon**  
Conference for people with Asperger syndrome to be held at The Institute of Psychiatry in October. Details to be circulated. Be there!

### **Answers to quizz**

10	The Austro-Hungarian empire
9	Medjugorje (Croat; between the hills)
8	Venice
7	Petrarch
6	Italy
5	St Benedict
4	Tintern Abbey
3	The Wye
2	In the Cotswolds, N Glos
1	The Medway