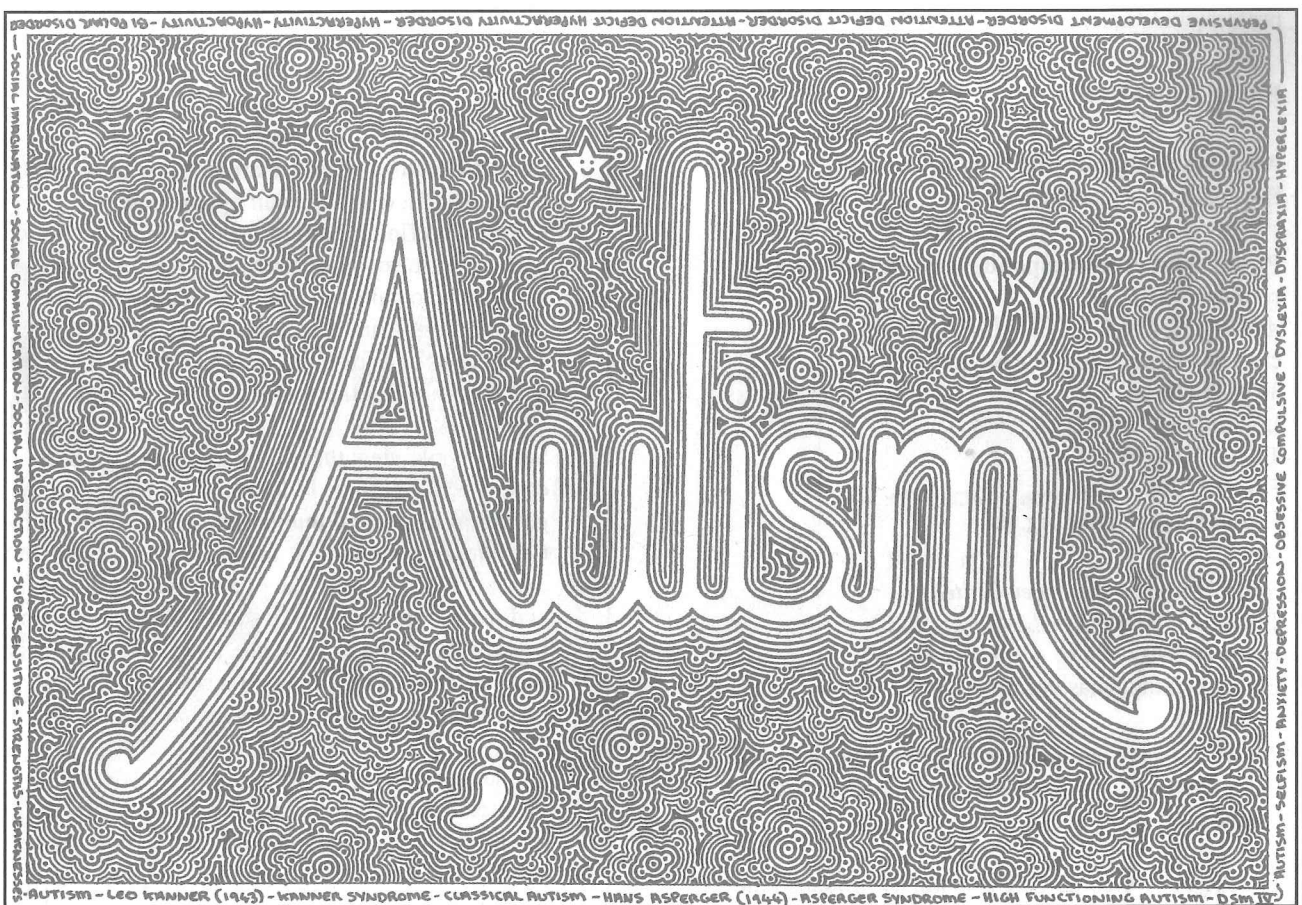


Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

Asperger

united

Edition 34 April 2003



Peter Myers - York, England - 25th December 2002



THE NATIONAL
AUTISTIC SOCIETY

Au



Asperger United is a self-help newsletter run by and for people with Asperger syndrome. The newsletter aims to put people with the condition in touch with each other and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

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

Editor John Joyce

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

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

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

Send your submissions - artwork, poetry and articles are all welcome - by 1 June 2003.

The Coventry Neurodiversity group

'The Coventry Neurodiversity group' is a new group. we recently had our first meeting at the Queens Road Baptist Church in Coventry and we will be meeting every month from now on at 5.30 pm on the last Wednesday of every month.

I have Asperger's syndrome, dyspraxia and dyslexia myself and have noted that the focus of many existing groups is too narrow as there are so many overlaps between conditions like Asperger syndrome, high functioning autism, ADHD, Tourettes syndrome, Dyspraxia, or Dyslexia. We all face the same difficulties when we are faced with society at large. This new group is an opportunity for people who find it hard to make friends and participate in social activities because of these conditions to gain new social skills. It's also an opportunity to find a safe place to talk about our frustrations and formulate strategies to tackle them and the obstacles that we face from outside.

Some people view these conditions as gifts and others as disabilities. In terms of the reception we get from the general public they are often disabilities but when we look at the skills we may have they are gifts. If only the people would understand and realise we are not like them, so we should not be expected to be exactly like them. If people wish us to adapt better to society then they have to realise that they have to meet us half way.

Unlike other groups you do not need a definite diagnosis to join. If you think you have one of these conditions and would like to learn more from people who have been diagnosed then you can come along.

The focus of the group will be about finding our own solutions from the pooling of our skills. We will hopefully supplement this by inviting outside speakers from time to time once things are established.

Contact: Larry Arnold 024 7661 7658

Email: Info@neurodiversity.info

Website: <http://www.neurodiversity.info>

Larry Arnold

Dear Readers

Welcome to the new issue of your newsletter. I hope you have all recovered from welcoming in the New Year. Thank you for all the material you have provided for this and future editions. We certainly have a talented array of readers and I appeal to you and other people with Asperger syndrome known to you to continue supplying us with information about any aspect of life as well as your poetry and other interests. I hope all seeking pen friends are successful but nothing is guaranteed.

Best wishes for Easter to all of you.

Your editor

John Joyce

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Hello, I'm Robert, I'm 38 years old and have only just been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. So what difference can it make and what was it like all those years ago when I didn't have the diagnosis?

Although I was born in England we moved to Malta when I was 2. I can recall things from early 1968 when I was not quite 4. Apparently, and I vaguely remember it, I always wanted to come back from places the same route as we had gone.

I started at St. Dorothy's Convent in September 1968, when I was 4, a school with a few nuns and other teachers. I can recall my first distaste for certain clothing then. There was a kind of big plain blue bib that some children used to wear, and I definitely didn't want to. I also got inconsolably upset when I lost one of my toy cows at the school, and buying another one like it wouldn't do – only finding the original would have done. I remember numbers being mentioned here, but didn't have much concept of what they were then.

On April 1st 1969 (although I don't think I was aware of the date at the time) we returned to England. Up to then I had supposed England to be Luqa Airport where my sister Rosemary used to fly to and from, because of attending boarding school in England. Since I wasn't taken there to fly from, but an airfield, I thought and said, 'This isn't England!'

I've never been back to Malta, and if I did now, I doubt whether I would truly recognise anything. I was terribly confused by the change of environment, and I think that the occasional revisit in the next few years would have helped me clarify certain things in my mind. All I have left is vague memories from when I was short of 5 years old.

I did various strange things back in England. For summer term '69 I went to a little school for people under five (although I turned five during the term). I behaved like an outsider looking in, didn't talk to people, play with the other children, or participate in classroom activities. Apparently it

was at this time that I started saying everything twice – I remember doing it, feeling that I was just intending to be bloody-minded. Maybe there was a more deep-seated reason, but I can't be sure.

In autumn term '69 I started at the only school I ever really liked. I played OK with the other boys, and made friends with some whose birthday parties I attended, and I eventually invited them to mine. I don't recall having much to do with the girls in my class. I played with others in the playground, but sometimes I was by myself and would get bullied by one of the school bullies.

At assembly once a boy whom I didn't know was brought in front of us all, and we were asked whom he had bullied. Various children stuck their hands up. Later my bully got the same treatment and I stuck my hand up too (although strangely I almost felt sorry for him).

I can remember I wouldn't wear one of the overalls for painting my picture and, since the teacher wouldn't let me paint without one on, I preferred to just draw, rather than wearing something I didn't like.

One lady, who wasn't my class teacher, had been very kind and helpful towards me, and I had a parcel with my name on it of next years stationery and books (or whatever it was) to put in a desk in her classroom, ready to start in her next year's class. I was inconsolable when I was told that because we were moving I couldn't continue at this school. I cried at home and said 'But I've got a parcel with my own name on it!' My sister said 'Never mind – they can scratch it off and put someone else's name on it'.

Has anybody ever more classically missed the point of what I was saying than in that response?

So I started at the school in the village we'd moved to in September 1970. And a right rough house it turned out to be. My new class teacher in Easter term '71 proved to be a bitch, and in addition I was horribly bullied. On one occasion, I was moved out of the state sector and started at a prep school in summer term '71, at first as a dayboy.

Looking back at these old school reports there is the first clear sign of teachers reporting that my concentration at lessons was variable, 'day-dreaming' being a much used phrase, obviously much more focus on whatever they wanted me to do being expected. School reports also mention that my coordination wasn't good. I remember that in rounders when trying to catch the ball I used to swing my arms so that they crossed and I ended up holding just below the opposite shoulder with each hand. The 'kind' lady taking us for games demonstrated this uncoordinated action to me with a degree of obvious exasperation and annoyance, making it clear that I must be a lesser person because of this.

I didn't like gym and felt most unnatural and clumsy at it and I wouldn't go into the swimming pool that term, probably because I didn't feel secure enough in present company. I convinced myself that I was scared of water, so that when my parents took me on a rowing boat on the Thames in the holiday I screamed (when my mother has referred to it afterwards she has always said, 'We thought it would be such a treat for you'). It was on this occasion when we stayed a couple of nights in Wimbledon with friends of my parents that they briefly drove past and showed me what was to become my public school six years later.

My performance as a dayboy at this prep school was variable but not bad on the whole.

One incident I remember relates, I think, to an image created by teachers. It had somehow been impressed on me that I was naughty if I needed to pee during a lesson. So during a gym lesson, rather than say anything to the teacher, I went into the backroom and peed over a chair that was placed there. I did it a second time the next term, and this time an inquisition was held. I never owned up.

I found out a couple of years on that they knew it was me. Obviously previous reactions to wanting to use the lavatory during lessons had created some confusion in my mind.

I also remember wondering how one was supposed to make friends – I asked my parents about this and they came up with a reply implying that it was a simple matter, which it certainly didn't seem for me. It was decided that from autumn term 1972 (when I was eight) I would board. This wasn't exceptional since some boys had started boarding at seven.

My performance during my last term as a dayboy (summer '72) was quite good. The headmaster wrote at the end of my report 'Coming along nicely, I'm sure boarding will bring him out more, and help him to stand on his own feet.'

Has anyone ever been more wrong in their lives? I could put off thinking about the coming prospect until the last days of the summer holidays, and then life's nightmares really began...

Thank you Robert. Very interesting reading. We'll publish part 2 in the next issue - John Joyce

I was reading the letter by Ali in the last issue of AU (33) about how people cope with noise ...

I find that certain loud noises also stress me out too. In work every week we have a fire alarm test on a Friday. Even though I know it's not a real fire alarm this is the worst time for me. To cope with this I use Bach's Rescue Remedy about an hour before the alarm is tested. This Friday when it went off I very nearly dropped all the filing I was carrying which would have been a disaster! The worst thing with our fire alarm in work is that they put on the boards that they'll test it at 11am but they don't usually test it till about either 11:10 or 11:20 so it's really scary when it just suddenly goes off. Then they switch it off and about 5-10 minutes later it rings again to test it. I wish they'd make a specific time for testing it.

There are a few other loud noises that scare me a bit, like when someone re-fills the water carrier up in the office. They always drop the water bottle on the floor or when somebody shuts the drawers and cabinets they always bang shut. I would suggest using Bach's as it's really good and helps de-stress you. I was recommended Bach's by Avonia, the leader of Warrington Aspergers Society (WASPS) her son also has Aspergers and he uses it when he

gets stressed out, and she told me that Michael, another Asperger, uses it at school.

As for the other things mentioned - loud music doesn't seem to affect me that much, although I don't actually like rock music. I only like music with a nice soothing bass line to it (The KLF, Eminem, Run DMC, Salt-N-Pepa), or parody music (Weird Al Yankovich). I always turn up the bass on my stereo because I love the feel of the floor when the bass is going through it (bump, bump, bump, bump!). The only problem with this is that whenever I put my music on I never seem to get anything done!

With traffic it does sometimes stress me out, especially when people rev their engines at you. There is one person in this area who seems to think it's funny to do this revving of the engine at me because he knows it scares me. I keep thinking that next time he does it he'll be getting a broken windscreen. I haven't actually gone that far yet as I'd probably get arrested and it wouldn't be his problem. Four times he's done it now and every time he sits there pointing at me laughing.

Fireworks in the streets - I don't like kids setting off fireworks as they always use loud bangers. But I love commercial displays of fireworks. Every year I try and go to one professional display of fireworks. The really big professional displays don't use a lot of bangers, they usually use really nice displays that create a nice picture as bangers don't actually do that much apart from frighten everyone. For fireworks night I find it better to go to the professional displays. I've been a few times to Blackpool and this year I went to Alton Towers. But I hate the time just before November and up to new year when kids are buying fireworks and setting them off in the street.

And as for TV, I don't find TV distracts me at all. Every night I leave my TV on the news channel. I like to know what's going on in the world and that nobody's going to try and blow us up during the night. The only time I started turning it off was last time we attacked Iraq, as it was so stressful to think about Saddam Hussein all night!

D Forster

I certainly agree with you on the noise of fireworks - John Joyce



letters to the editor

Dear Editor

Regarding Ali's letter about noise. I am sensitive to noise such as loud music (particularly trendy dance), barking dogs and alarms. There are some noises I like and have control over. For example I play my own taste in music to mask my neighbour's coughing although I can't do much if he plays his loud dance music. I like mechanical noises and have recorded some of these on a little dictaphone. These are rhythmic noises and because of this they are reassuring, unlike the ones Ali mentions. I used to use a personal stereo on trains to use music to cut out noises and the feeling of being hemmed in if it was a busy train. I also used it when trying to get to sleep. Unlike Ali, I have to use earplugs as I have difficulty getting to sleep and the slightest noise (I also live in a flat) makes it even harder.

Susannah Burden

Dear Asperger United

I was interested in Ali's letter in AU January 2003, about noise.

I am a little upset when my neighbour plays loud music throughout the night, which he does occasionally.

Where I live there are enbloc garages and I get extremely upset when boys kick balls against the metal doors of these garages, which include my own.

M. Barker

Dear Editor

Research for Cambridge University

A student at Cambridge University wanted to do research into whether people with Asperger Syndrome can be trained to recognise emotions. So Mr Golan tested us in September 2002 with faces and voices to see if we could tell how people were feeling and then we were given ten weeks training at Autism London before being tested again in December 2002. That was to find out if we could do better the second time, after training.

The training involved working by oneself with a computer programme for two hours and a group discussion once a week. I think it would have been hard for someone with no disability to answer the questions properly. On a computer screen one does not see a whole situation and one had to choose from many emotions of a similar kind. I did tell the researcher that in England one often keeps a straight face so one cannot always tell the emotion by the face.

I do not think it taught us how to recognise emotions, but it taught us to be aware of other people's emotions and proved people with Asperger syndrome have some idea of what other people are thinking. Yesterday I found it interesting seeing the researcher's office while he was doing his tests for the final time at Cambridge University, my first visit to Cambridge for ten years and I, like other people, am awaiting my results with interest.

David Shamash
December 2002

ARTISM

Artism is a project looking for the autistic artist. The main idea is that the artist living with autism and Asperger's syndrome can exhibit their work alongside the established and successful artist.

Funding for framing and presentation is available.

Anyone interested please contact Caroline on :

020 7687 1498

email csphalden@hotmail.com

or write in via *AU*



How to reply to **Pen Pals**

- Please remember to let us know the full name (including surname) of the person who your letter is for.

- To contact a pen pal, please send your letter to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.

- We will pass your letter on to the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.

- Please note that all penpal letters sent via *Asperger United* are opened before being passed on

- Young people under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.

My name is Martin. I'm 25 years old and I have Asperger syndrome. I'm looking for a female companion in the Staffordshire area. My interests are world history, archaeology, geology, model railways, rocks and minerals, drawing historical buildings and landscapes, computers and going to the pub.

I'm Susannah and I have high-functioning autism/Asperger syndrome. I have a large number of interests including windmills, the environment, megaliths, fire fighters' clothing and the Second World War. I also like a lot of different types of music and Trigger Happy T.V.

I have no close friends and very little social life. This is one reason why I have a problem with bad depression. I live in north east Essex but would be happy with a penfriend from any area.

Susannah – Braintree, Essex

Joe, aged 14 from Croydon has started a cinema group that meets on the first Sunday of every month.

If you are interested in joining please contact via *Asperger United*. Joe has Asperger syndrome.

My name is John Ferguson. I am 16 years old and I have Asperger syndrome.

I do not go out a lot but I like watching football, listening to music and playing my computers.

I would like to find a pen pal who has Asperger's and who would like to write to me as I find it very hard to make friends easily.

My name is Julie, I am 49 and have high functioning autism. I am looking for male companionship in the Coventry/West Midland area. My hobbies are crafts/needlepoint, listening to music, talking about places of interest. I also like having good conversations.

Thank you



Land of the golden chicken pie truck going to the fair

Well I have slightly over a week, of my vacation, to go here.
I've taken out adverts in, a few Colorado newspapers.
For songs about me.
No-one much has answered this.
And I still have, no-one to date me.
Sometimes it hurts me a lot, when I have, no-one pretty much to see.
Today Jim from The Denver Post, has taken me out, in his car.
Been to Georgetown, and what that other place was called, I've no clue.

Even here they say "I'll let you ner, na, ner".
With the chicken pie truck going to the fair.

I've just had a sleep after, Jim took me out, all about.
Now I'm up again.
Back in England, I used to write to, Jim and other DJ's.
Until it made me feel, like I was going insane.
Although at one time, they used to play me.
Loads of Bob Dylan stuff.
Now the radio, is a bit, fed-up with me I reckon.
So now I have, things a bit, more tough.

Even here they say "I'll let you ner, na, ner".
With the chicken pie truck going to the fair.

It seems odd that Jim, is the same, name sake, as the guy.
I used to write to, when I was just a, bit more than a kid.

I think Mrs T, gave him his armchair.
And when I knew that, that did it, a lot for me.
So I wrote to Anna Ford, at The Newsroom, to see if she could.
Go and fix him.
I never had much luck, writing off to Jim.
Maybe he put, all my letters, in the bin?

Even here they say "I'll let you ner, na, ner".
With the chicken pie truck going to the fair.

It will be Valentine's Day Friday here I think?
Once again, there's no-one here, to date me, for a drink.
Jim says they might, attack Iraq, in the dark?
Some of the women here, have broken, my heart.
I used to be told that, this was, the land of golden dreams.
Now it's the land of, the golden chicken pie truck, going to the fair.
Here David "I'll let you ner, na, ner, na, ner".
So when people, sometimes get onto me here, why should I care?

Even here they say "I'll let you ner, na, ner".
With the chicken pie truck going to the fair.

David C. Miedzianik
Written. 9th February 2003.

A winter poem

Darkness has fallen over the earth,
Every being in the city slumbered,
The cold crept into the earth like a prowling creature,
enveloping all in its vast whiteness.
It coated everything in its cloak of snow
And reaped down warmth with its sword of ice.
Making, like a noble creator,
Destroying, like an evil demon.
In the morning the people awoke,
They saw the beauty of the snow.
It glinted like a treasure,
Its smell was like pine,
The sight of it was like gleaming gems of ice,
The ground was like a blank sheet of paper.

The snow was as white as an overly polished white board,
And the people felt the bite of the cold,
But saw its magnificence
And the beauty it could create.
The snow flakes were tiny particles of ice,
Each one splendid as a jewel,
Forged by the genius of the cold
And the goodness of nature.....

Tom Barker
Aged 11

Thanks Tom - Young Asperger Poets (YAPPIES) arise!
John Joyce - Editor

Here is a piece I'm sending in the hope that it can be included in Asperger United. It is about topics I'm sure many including myself have tried to avoid most of the time but in the end when something is staring at you so blatantly all the time it becomes impossible to shelve it. Thus this is also my way of dealing with such harsh realities.

Inhumanity

With each day that passes I feel the magnitude of the plight that my children will suffer steadily grow...

My children who are not yet born and at this rate they never will be, due to my growing intolerance towards the human race.

Once I was apathetic to the idea, although I don't dislike children, for they are the key to the future and I thought one day I would have some. Now I just don't know? You see we haven't even been around 1% of the period the dinosaurs were and yet there is already speculation of our premature demise. Day by day however this speculation seems to be becoming closer to reality, with experts predicting extinction. Well if we carry on the way we are we may well deserve this... after all many animals have suffered this fate, there as in epochal history from which no particular species is exempt...after all the dinosaurs reigned supreme for millions of year and there weren't exempt. We're evidently the

only animal who destroys eco-systems in such a massive way... Most animals are able to live in harmony with their environment so why can't we? What makes us so special? We're supposed to be superior, so how come we are a minority? Rhetorical questions ensue...Backwards surely is the best way forwards, since any other way means more destruction. Or maybe we have already come too far forward to now turn back? All the government are concerned with is losing votes and economic gain...this can only be a recipe for disaster...the millennium dome epitomizes this greatly. Yeah right! More like the delirium dome and we're supposed to be a democracy... Ironical then that the government were the only ones pro dome.

Evidently humans are potentially an enemy to every living thing especially ourselves... i.e. differing religions have invariably inevitably lead to war on some scale... and war is simply more destruction and

always involves innocent civilian fatalities.

I ask whether will we ever turn from the loathsome selfish contemptible creatures that we are? Or will we continue to live this life-in-death experience that we all deep down surely want to escape... This is why I fear for the children of the future, because this world has become so unpredictable and inhospitable and clearly their well being is firmly in our hands... and no one is exempt from that duty, in my view. If you don't believe me just ask environmentalists, who believe the next generation will be one that is more than likely going to live in an environment that is uninhabitable.

So I ask, who would want to give life and rear a child in such an environment?

Jaimes Dallimore

*Thanks, Jaimes for your thoughts
John Joyce*

Snow White at Fairfield's Hall, Croydon

I went with Claire (my community support worker) and my fellow 'Keyring' tenants to see the Fairfield pantomime, Snow White. Snow White was a good play. I give it 10 out of 10. It was wonderful.

I got a programme for £2.50, which was nice and gave it to Chris as a Christmas Present as he came late to drama where we re-enacted the story from a fairy tale book which was very successful indeed and gave me more insight into the true meaning of the story. I thought it was good because it was funny and cruel!!!

There were good costumes in the show with animals and I liked the ladies in white. It was one cool show.

The best joke was: 'Don't take sweets from strangers, but you are all right with me I'm just strange' and 'Why do the Telly Tubbies go to the toilet together? because there is only one tinky winky.'

The funny man was called Muddles. He was my favourite character as was Smiler the dwarf. He brought children on to the stage and got them to sing aloud and then gave

them sweets. It was like "Stars In your eyes". He had a dog, and a lady was trying to steal it and whenever she tried to touch the dog the audience had to shout out "MUDDLES". The Snake puppet was also very Funny.

It was good for me to see the play as I am studying drama and looking to become a comedy star or actor as a profession.

By Lloyd Burgis.

Thank you Lloyd - John Joyce

A positive experience of AS diagnosis and support

I write as a 65 year old man who had A.S. diagnosed about 4 years ago.

I first became aware that I might have A.S. through my wife, who had found me difficult to live with for various reasons. She gave me one of the NAS leaflets to look at, which I did after a little and promptly realised that the A.S. behaviour was very applicable to myself. In some ways it was a relief to discover something more tangible which might help both myself and our marriage.

At this point firstly my wife asked to see a (woman) A.S. practitioner, who subsequently saw me and diagnosed me with A.S. Subsequently she gave us counselling as a couple.

Before I continue with how things have progressed after that, I think it is important to point out that when first confronted with the possibility of AS., many men (it is mostly men) don't want to face the possibility of having anything wrong with them. It is only when one can conceive that things are not right, and that there may be scope to do something about it, that things can move on. I think there are many people with A.S. who do not wish to change the status quo or acknowledge their deficiencies. Indeed, recognising the possibility of A.S. is perhaps more important than going through diagnosis and subsequent help or counselling. This applies probably more to adults, who are in charge of their own destiny, while children are still under the care of their parents.

So what of my experiences through life? As a child at school, I was bright (called brainy), but not good with connecting with other children and hopeless at sport. I went to public school, partly because my father thought I should get away from a dominant mother, and was frankly pretty hopeless there, apart from academically. I became the school joke; it was probably a way

to get attention to myself, not minding too much to be laughed at. Then I got to Oxford, with a prior holiday job in a lab which I enjoyed with 'real' people.

Once at Oxford, I bribed my way into students' friendship with lots of tea, biscuits and crumpets. The others on my course (physics) were tolerant of me; I was fortunate enough to share a room with a Chinese student from Hong Kong who had a great understanding of my immaturity and funny ways. I did enjoy myself there even though many thought me odd. Still, Oxford, though being privileged and irritating me on that score, is fairly tolerant of eccentricity if you have the ability to go there. One thing I couldn't cope with, though, was uncertainty of research in physics; previously everything had been black and white and this really threw me.

I progressed through an engineering career with reasonable technical ability (and some arrogance), though fairly hopeless in dealing with people. I started becoming more successful with girls from the age of about 24, and I actually married the girl of my choice, and not my mother's at 26. A teacher, she wasn't what I had looked for in a marriage partner, just sympathetic, mature, and doing mostly what I said.

My career progressed, with my aim to imitate my father, a successful Jewish refugee with many inventions and patents who made money out of being a consultant. I moved around considerably, without thinking about the consequences for my family, and started two businesses. Both were unsuccessful as I thought that the product was more important than the management, at which I was poor. The second business ran away with a lot of money, caused grief to my family, and nearly broke up our marriage. I would not listen to what my wife had to say, who at

last was learning to express her feelings and the truth through her anger.

How did I progress beyond this? Firstly, my father died and I inherited and retired early. As we did not fit into the affluent London suburb round my parents' house, I retired early, and we moved up to Cumbria. I was also trying to connect more with my long-suffering wife, and was therefore more ready to pick up on A.S. The counselling helped us to work things out better, though we acknowledge that having AS means that I will always be deficient in some respects.

So now we live our retired life in Cumbria. When asked by my daughter, what has been the best time of my life, I would say it was retirement. And why? Since I have had the AS diagnosis, which at the time was a relief, I think I have learnt to relate better to my wife and others, making for a better quality of life all round.

I think two lessons can be learnt. As I said earlier, most people who are suspected of having AS don't want to know. It appears initially as a stigma, but in reality once the possibility of AS is admitted and it is diagnosed, this can turn out to be a considerable benefit.

The second lessons stems from the first. Many suspected of AS or with AS don't want to get in touch with professionals, but would rather talk to another person with AS, though the NAS Helpline is very useful and helpful. Your newsletter works on this basis. They would also prefer the anonymity of keeping it 'within the family' i.e. the AS fraternity. That is why I was interested to read Mark Bleasdale's letter about AS consultancy. Perhaps what is also needed is Aspergers Anonymous, similar to Alcoholics Anonymous and other xxxx Anonymous bodies.

Peter Krebs

Southdown Buses - R. Haines

Readers interested in buses and transport will really enjoy this article ...

In 1980 I finally became free of school life. I started doing my A' levels at a sixth form college in September and in the second week started travelling there on the buses.

The first day I caught the bus to college was Thursday 11th September 1980. I think my first bus was a Bristol VR. I was vaguely aware that my old notion of a double Decker was with the entrance and stairs at the back. This had a front entrance with a remote controlled pair of doors and a staircase directly behind the driver, which orientated from front to back as you went up it. I went and sat upstairs, and having never seen these places from an elevated view before, found it rather exciting. I had to change buses halfway through my trip and I think the second bus was also a Bristol on this occasion, but perhaps an older model predating the orange rubber cushion cover popular in the latter half of the seventies.

I missed the school bus in the afternoon and caught an ordinary service bus, where I was surprised to find use of a separate conductor to the driver. I think this bus was probably a Leyland Atlantean with green cushion covers. As in the standard Bristol the staircase was directly behind the driver, but you mounted this staircase at its back and turned forward as you went up it. These differed from Bristols in having slightly taller bodies and straighter edges as well as having the rearmost upstairs seat sticking out over the engine radiator (essentially the lower deck finished slightly further forward). I missed my connection to the homeward bus that afternoon and rang for a lift from Mother.

On the Friday my second bus to college was a single-decker and I found this rather boring since I liked the elevated view – in fact it was a Leyland National. In the afternoon I caught the school bus and then the final bus home. When I got on this bus I had another surprise – it was a Bristol double-decker but there was no staircase immediately behind the driver. I had to walk halfway through the lower deck to get the stairs. These middle staircases started at the back and turned forwards as you climbed up (unlike the standard Bristols but as in the Atlanteans) – I found it rather untidy as you have to walk past half the lower deck seats to reach the stairs and it breaks the upper deck into two small sections. When I got off the pair of middle exit doors opposite the staircase were opened for me (this extra pair of doors reduced the lower deck seating capacity by four).

As the weeks, months and terms went by I gradually became more aware of various things to do with the buses. Leyland Atlanteans seemed to be mostly used for bus routes to and from Havant Bus Station (which

was where my bus to the college finally terminated) while buses between Portsmouth and other places tended to use Bristols (including my first bus out in the morning and final bus home in the afternoon). This was the general pattern but exceptions were frequent on both sides. Buses with front doors were intended of course for single person driver and conductor (which saves money of course, but results in extra time when the bus is stationary if there are many without passes who have to pay the fare in cash then), but at least one pair of regular routes and some school buses used a separate conductor.

As well as some Bristols having the stairs in the middle, I soon became aware of another variation in the Bristol – some of them had no handlebars upstairs, the convex driver's viewing mirror in the middle of the front instead of in the driver's side corner, and a double sideways seat at the front nearside, instead of the usual single forward facing one, and only a two seater instead of the usual three seater in front of the stairwell. I later found out that the differences were because these had detachable roofs and could be converted to open top.

By the end of the first term I was observing closely the registration numbers and serial numbers of buses. Because this was only a part of the large Southdown Buses area I only saw those allocated to the Havant and Portsmouth area (however I could occasionally glimpse others being used on the 700 Brighton to Portsmouth route which drove along Havant's main shopping street).

The Leyland Nationals were registered WYJ164-171S (serial numbers 64-71) and YCD86-88T (86-88). These had central exit doors and seated 44. There were also four without central exit doors that seated 52 (these might have been Series 2) – they were registered GYJ921-922V and HFG923-924V (serial numbers 121-124). The gaps in the sequence obviously operated elsewhere. Sometimes individual buses changed regions and an earlier two door appeared registered RUF37R.

The Leyland Atlanteans were registered PUF131-144M (serial numbers 701-714), PUF715-721M and LCD42-47P (serial 742-747). Again the gaps in the sequence operated elsewhere. These seated 73 – 43 upstairs and 30 downstairs. The minor differences between the older ones and those dating two years later included the use of orange rubber instead of green rubber cushion covers in the latter set as well as some differences in colouring in the inside décor. I have no idea why the first 14 registration numbers only match the final digit of the serial number – maybe numbers 701-714 in this registration group were already allocated.

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The Bristols with the stairs in the middle were registered AAP658-662T and AAP668-672T. They seated 70. 43 upstairs and 27 downstairs (the central exit doors reducing lower deck seating capacity by four).

In fact the whole set was AAP653-672T, and I think that during the two years I was using Southdown Buses regularly 658 and 659 were reallocated elsewhere. I later found out that there was an earlier set of ten with the stairs in the middle registered UFG624-633S, plus an even earlier set of ten with detachable roofs as well (registered I think TNJ594-603S). AAP672T used an electronic route number and destination display, but was ultimately changed to the ordinary roller blind display.

The Bristols with detachable roofs were registered UWV605, 608-613S (605 being reallocated from elsewhere during my second term). They seated 74 – 43 upstairs and 31 downstairs (as with standard Bristols the only difference in seating layout being as described earlier). The whole set was registered UWV604-623S.

The standard Bristols as far as I remember were – OCD763G (the whole series went from OCD763-772G as far as I could tell, with some of these oldies being brought out for use periodically), TCD506J, UUF110J (with some kind of all over advertising around lower deck I think) and WCD521-526K. These were all part of larger series and I would occasionally see others from these series – these early Bristols only seated 70 – 39 upstairs and 31 downstairs – (they had various patterns of colour seats from fabric as well as rubber).

The earliest 74-seaters in my area were from the group GNJ565-574N, again having patterned seats with more fabric than rubber. One in between also popped up registered NCD550M, but I don't remember boarding this one.

The first with orange rubber seat covers were SNJ684S (serial number 584), PUF585R and SNJ590-593R. At the end of my first term a very unfortunate adjustment was made to SNJ591R – the back two rows of double seats upstairs were replaced with hard plastic seats. The first time I sat down on one I hadn't realized they were hard and hurt my backside and over the next year I occasionally observed others doing this too. I always imagined it to be a result of someone having slashed up the proper seats with a knife – someone thought that if people couldn't treat soft seats properly they'd give us hard ones: rather unwise to make all passengers suffer because of the stupidity of a few if they wanted the bus to remain a popular option. Maybe it wasn't this and I wonder if Southdown would have replied and explained the reason if I'd written to complain.

Other Standard Bristols were XAP643-645S (with XAP634S also being allocated to my area from summer '81 with a very colourful all over advertising livery), the full series was of course XAP634-645S, AAP646-649T (series going up to AAP652T), EAP985-988V (serial numbers 685-688), full series being EAP973-999V (673-699), JWV251W and JWV266-269W (full series being JWV250-275W) plus JWV976W (serial number 276). The V suffix ones reintroduced patterned fabric as well as orange rubber to the seat covers and the W suffix ones dispensed with the cigarette stubbers at the backs of seats that had been standard on the top decks of Bristols.

By the time I finished using Southdown Buses regularly in July 1982 a few changes had occurred, most notably the loss of the last separate conductors to the drivers.

I moved to London for college where I could explore the Routemasters in full detail, having begun during my Southdown period – and that is another chapter to come.

New book news

Asperger syndrome and long-term relationships
Ashley Stanford
Foreword by Liane Holliday Willey

This book offers support and insight to anyone with Asperger syndrome and also people in a relationship with them.

Misunderstandings are easy in any relationship but especially with a person who has Asperger syndrome. Ashley has been married to a man with Asperger syndrome for 14 years and this book

offers a wealth of comfort and successful solutions. She explores Asperger behaviour in detail and explains strategies for better communication and relief of tensions.

Asperger syndrome and long-term relationships is published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers and, like all the best books on autism and Asperger syndrome, it is available from NAS Publications. It costs £13.95, plus postage and packing.

Special offer to readers of *Asperger United*!

Normally we charge an additional £3.95 for postage and packing on all book orders but readers of *Asperger United* can get their copies without this additional charge until 31 May 2003.

Just send your order, together with cheque or postal order made payable to the NAS or your credit card details, to *Asperger United* – see page 2 for full contact details.



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