Produced by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions

Asperger United

Edition **66** April 2011

The National Autistic Society

Asperger United

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

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

Asperger United is free. To subscribe you, we need your postal address. We ask for a contribution of £6 per year from overseas readers and £10 from professionals and institutions to cover postage costs. Please make cheques payable to the NAS. Organisations requiring multiple copies: no extra fee, please get in touch.

Editor the Goth

Telephone and production support
The National Autistic Society's Publications Department

Asperger United was founded in 1993 by Pamela Yates and Patricia Howlin, in association with the Maudsley Hospital, and Mark Bebbington and Judy Lynch of the National Autistic Society.

This was in response to a recognised dearth of services for people with Asperger syndrome and the potential for self help and networking as a means of support for this group.

The provisions for editor's and sub-editor's post was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at. This post also provided the possibility of work experience and responsibility and has benefited those who have held the position. These are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds, John Joyce and the current editor, the Goth (who does not wear black).

Pamela Yates provided support and advice to the editors until the publication was handed over to the National Autistic Society in 2000.

The name *Asperger United* was chosen by the group of original readers as the most "appropriate name" for the publication. This was suggested by Anna Cohen.

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:

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

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

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.

Contributions for the next issue should reach *AU* by **16 May '11**

Welcome to the April edition of *Asperger United*. I am pleased to say that more than nineteen out of every twenty letters about the new look were wholly positive, and for those three who did make some suggestions (as I've explained in individual letters which I've sent), some of the changes were unavoidable because of the change in technology.

A few letters about sensory sensitivities were received, but as the one chosen to feature is also about work, this has become the work edition by default!

Also, I hope nobody is disappointed by the black-and-white cover photo: black-and-white images will continue to feature on the cover from time to time, and I hope you'll agree that this is a very striking image, well worth featuring.

There were a number of letters sent in that asked questions to the readers, some of which I've been able to include, so I hope some of you will be able to answer one of two of the questions. But please don't feel that you have to reply to all of them — one reader tried to do this a couple of years ago and found it exhausting — just answer the one or ones that most interest you.

I look forward to reading all your letters, and I hope you enjoy the issue,

the Editor

the work edition — next issue notice on page 11

Contents

Sensitivity and clothing

by **Maurice**

As a case of the aspie/attention deficit pairing, I have always had active body energy and an active metabolism, child who never kept still, and a heat sensitivity. It makes me a very visible case of "sensory issues", when a spectrumite's body is discomforted by certain clothes and fabrics. I have read that there are other spectrumites who share my need to always wear shorts.

This is done in pursuit of comfort, not for showing off or to test my limits of endurance. I am distressed to think of anyone who might want to be a "shortist" feeling frightened out of starting it because they need more privacy than they can get for finding their own temperature limit. Always ultra-wary of any form of pressure, when I started I did not declare my intention openly before the point where I was successfully getting through a winter. In an astronomy society, astronomy itself being an activity that can carry an unwelcome pressure to dress warmly, I knew an older man who was shortist to a limiting temperature of 6C. He got by fine with that, keeping the type of company where he could explain himself sensibly.

In a time like the recent snow, an easier life would be made by having some understanding of why you are going around in shorts, than exhaustingly to stand always ready for odd reactions, which is the burden of defending your liberty. You don't get odd reactions from most people, who go about their own business without scrutinising your clothes. A cloak-like long coat, being sensible outerwear in the most intensely snowing or frosty conditions, has made a good outerwear option to keep shorts wearable in those conditions too, conveniently masking them without subjecting your legs to the rubbing gripping hurt of trouser fabric and keeping the shorts costume in place for when you take the coat off.

This works in any conditions I have encountered here in Scotland, where I have seen it done by kilt wearers too. But I don't boast that it would be adequate in the Arctic or Russia. Without having personal experience of what is adequate in those places, I would be totally reluctant to go to them in winter for fear of not finding the coat option's limits freely but having my choices affected by fear. But there must be many folks, spectrumite or otherwise, who have shortist bodies but who live in the places with those severe climates and need to avoid frostbite. There is a need for all known information on the safe limits to all levels of protection from sub-zero cold, to be made available to everyone. Most obviously that means on the web, now that we have it. There should be particular interest in this while the recent winter experience is fresh in memory.

East Scotland's climate suits me ideally, and we have a good cultural history of cold-resistant limbs. But I grew up in South Wales, and in pre-internet times, and that was disastrous to me as a "shortist". It deprived me of discovering that any such option exists and that perpetual shorts are not harmful to health. This can happen to us if a region's climate has an air quality that produces catarrhal symptoms resembling having a cold. That this tends to happen around long narrow waterways which make air damp, is confirmed by "Thames Valley catarrh" I saw mentioned in a health column, and Cardiff Nose is another, alongside the Bristol Channel's strong tides where they funnel into its closed end. The Welsh coast is caught between this and the mountains which generates rain. Growing up there cheated me of an aspect of my identity and my wellbeing.

How could that happen 5,000 years into the history of civilisation, that any past knowledge of such local factors was swamped? It must be a result of how, since mid-twentieth century, the health culture has a strident, pushy assumption of knowing better about protecting health and taking it more seriously than in history. This attitude might effectively erase all of the past knowledge there may have been of safe limits to tolerance of cold and of misleading local climates. This is another reason why shared information is important.

Comments of surprise mostly come from older folks. I was born just after the era of long shorts that practically met the socks, and that era was explained to me by saying that there was so little gap that they were not the same thing thermally as shorts. The accuracy of that is thrown into question by the way that era gets written about now. Yet perhaps the writers' memories are confusing them, writing from the perspective of now. If folks who remember that era are not imbued with the concept of perpetual shorts being sensible, then there must be some truth in that explaining away of what happened then, that no it was not perceived as a substantial gap in clothes. In my childhood, upsettingly for a boy, it was commonplace for girls to have a similar gap between socks and skirt, and I had to struggle to apply the same explanation to that, while not knowing if this was accurate.

In an era so hyper-strong on child cruelty, it is incredible to logic that there exist uniforms with perpetual shorts, doing visibly absurd suffering to the majority who have them, while I in the minority who would have liked it never had it. I never knew they existed when that age, for they are very uncommon in South Wales. I always had uniforms with longs, the fabric burning my skin when sitting, adding to my distraction, while seeing the girls have choice over leg-wear. This gender discrimination, which exists in most schools, is never mentioned by the big voices in education. I envy the opportunities that a small number of boys have found to challenge it and make news, in one case by wearing a skirt and finding it a better summer choice. This carelessness with folks' health is why, at age 42, my moral sickening towards everything about school uniforms is stronger than ever, and to be part of smashing them gives meaning to life.

It is discriminatory, too, to have such a focus on children. The sensory issue does not disappear when you grow up, which makes judging leg-wear in any way by age and to be against shorts for adults is bigotry. I'm writing of living the reality of that as an adult, and medically needing there not to be dress codes reducing the range of work I can take on. Nor should this be only about legs. It applies the same to barefooters, who have widespread writings on the hostility they encounter, and the folks who go around in T-shirts, and others. My top half is more warmly dressed than them. The reputation I sometimes get for being impervious to cold is totally wrong, I take care to protect my heat core and that is what keeps the shorts doable.

The autistic spectrum proves that every dress code is an assault on minority groups, so is against human rights. The Dalai Lama included banning of folk costumes in his itemising of genocide in Tibet. While some think genocide should only refer to death, its definition is to destroy "in whole or part" the existence of a group, including to crush its visibly manifested existence. Dress codes do that.

What about dangerous work and the safety wear needed? Nobody who the safety wear is incompatible with must have to do the work concerned. I must not do work that needs protective trousers, but I have worked gardening in steel-capped boots and a barefooter must not have to do that. If you have a sensitive head you must never have to enter a hard-hat site. I will not go on a boat tour of marine wildlife where they gave you waterproof trousers.

My employment support has stood by my shorts as a serious workers' medical need to the local training agency and at benefits medicals. That is ground won, which we must hold on to. This can be done for children too. So do we see the autism organisations speaking out against dress codes?

Dear Goth,

Thank you for putting one of my articles into the last edition of *Asperger United*. I really like the new lay-out. Below is another piece that might find its way into *AU* some time.

Computers: friends or foes?

I don't know why it is widely assumed that autistic people excel with computers. For me, being a pictorial thinker and taking words by their literal meaning, the world of computers has always been very confusing.

For example, a desktop to me is the top of a wooden table with drawers at the sides. When I hear the word icon, I think of a painting of Jesus in an Orthodox Church.

To click is to make a sound with your tongue or fingers and to download reminds me of luggage being lifted from a plane or lorry. A mouse is a little animal with whiskers, too shy to be touched, while a keyboard is a musical instrument similar to a piano.

And this is only the very basics of computer language, never mind the hundreds of more complicated terms. Adding my sensory aversion to electronic noise and flickering screens, I am not likely to ever make friends with computers and become competent in working with them. However, in almost every profession you are nowadays expected to be a computer expert, so I fear that my academic skills and qualifications will soon be worthless, unless it is acknowledged that these issues are part of my ASD and require adjustments to be made under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Elkie

Thank you, you raise some interesting points and I look forward to people's opinions. Sorry it took so long for your last article to appear! Unfortunately, many people have to wait a long time. Your patience is appreciated, Ed.

Dear Editor

I have been receiving *Asperger United* for a couple of years on behalf of my 13-year-old son. I think the new colour issue with extra content is the best issue I have read. I enjoyed the variety of articles, poems, art, reviews and letters, and I think you have got the balance just right. I am looking forward to the next issue.

I hope the theme of the next issue will be "work", as this is something which I know is a source of concern to my son as he is growing up. Although he is only 13 he is worried about leaving the security of school and facing the challenge of finding a job in which he feels he can both fit in with other people, and make use of his talents.

It would be interesting to hear the views of readers who have experienced the world of work, and those who have faced obstacles in finding a job. I wonder if any research has been done on this subject, and whether there are any types of jobs which are more suited to people with Asperger's?

I work for a government agency which prides itself on its equality and diversity policies, and I would like to believe that someone who was not neurotypical would feel accepted and valued in my organisation. However, I fear that the reality is that most of my colleagues have no awareness of the autistic spectrum, and are too quick to label people as different or "a bit strange" if they have some autistic traits. For this reason I worry about my son's future, as I feel a difficult road lies ahead.

Lisa

Thank you for your letter. This is one of the rare occasions when AU *publishes a letter that is not written by someone on the spectrum, as I think you ask some important questions. I am sure there are readers out there who have experiences relevant to your son's future as an adult hoping for secure employment, and I look forward to reading them, Ed.*

Pen pals

Pen pal number 83

Hello, my name is Robert. I am 46 and was diagnosed with Asperger's in 2008.

I also have epilepsy and Tourette's syndrome. I live in Birmingham with my wife and our cat, Raymond, and we have somehow managed to stay married for 25 years. Although I have found a little help, there seems nobody who I have much in common with and no one I can talk to about not only my situation and as we don't seem to be able to find many couples in our situation, either.

I do voluntary work a couple of days a week at a museum. My hobbies include writing poetry and plays, computers, computer gaming, playing guitar and local history and rock music.

Would love to hear from anyone around my age group for friendship!

Pen pal number 84

Hello, my name is Elizabeth. I live in Lincolnshire with my parents. I am 28 and I was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome in 2008.

I am a very creative person. I enjoy making cards and other crafts. I am also interested in fashion, listening to music and I enjoy shopping.

I am a volunteer in a local charity shop which I thoroughly enjoy. I am able to use my artistic flair there by helping with the window displays and making posters for the shop.

I would love to hear from other people around my age, who have the same interests as me, especially card making.

How to place a pen-pal advert

All you need to do is send your advert along with your name and address (and email address if you want) to *Asperger United*. You can use the Royal Mail or email. The next pen-pal number will be given to your advert when it arrives.

How to reply to pen pals

- Please remember to let us know the name and number of the person whom your letter is for. (All pen pals are numbered by the editor, not the person who sends in the advert.)
- To contact a pen pal, please send your letter to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG.
- We will pass your letter on to the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.
- Please note that all pen-pal letters sent via *Asperger United* are opened before being passed on.
- Those under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen-pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.

****Important notice — please read****

Asperger United is happy to publish pen-pal advertisements but we must stress that we are not a pen-pal or introduction organisation. We do not match people up and we cannot monitor letters (other than the first letter, that is sent via us) so please be cautious when releasing personal details in your letters. The National Autistic Society / *Asperger United* cannot intervene or be held responsible for any ensuing correspondence between letter-writers.

Dear *AU*,

today I came across your magazine and enjoyed reading it immensely. One thing that startled me was how many people have managed to obtain assessments and diagnoses of Asperger's syndrome despite being adults. I am 40 years old and have recently come to believe I have Asperger's syndrome. I was given a psychiatric diagnosis in 1992 and the local community mental health team refuses to assess me. My GP referred me to an assessment with a learning difficulties team but they refused to assess me because I am not learning-disabled and am over 18 years of age. In edition 63 of *AU*, Christopher writes of how he got referred to a consultant in Cardiff and diagnosed there. I was wondering if it is possible for him to let me know the name of this consultant so I can ask to be referred, as I also live in Wales. Any other information regarding how to obtain a diagnosis would be much appreciated. I plan to return to university next year and a diagnosis would be very helpful in getting me the support I need to carry out my studies.

Many thanks,

Jo

Information about referrals and diagnosis is available from the NAS Helpline on **0845 070 4004**
or by e-mail: **autismhelplinemail@nas.org.uk**

Ed.

Asperger United

Thank you for my copy of *Asperger United*, edition 65; this is the best edition I have ever read. The articles are interesting and intelligent and I really enjoyed it.

It's much improved — well done Goth.

Sahajo

Dear Goth,

thought I would put pen to paper and write a letter with some questions that you could put in *AU*.

a) How do the following relate to one another: Asperger's syndrome, shyness, being quiet, introvert?

b) What about the location in society of Asperger people in terms of urban/non-urban environments. I wonder if there are relatively more Asperger people in non-urban environments?

c) What is the situation for Asperger's people in countries other than the UK?

It seems to me that there's always the tendency in the world to push out the quiet, shy, Asperger person and allow the talkative, extrovert, social person to be dominant.

I think anyone who is a "bit different" is up against it to some extent in society — different levels in different situations. I'm looking forward to a time when Jesus Christ returns and this world (people, etc.) are sorted out and there's an end to stress and people can be themselves not having to justify their existence in any way. Is anyone else looking for the above?

From **Jed**

PS. How many homes/people does *AU* go to?

Thank you for your ideas, it will be interesting to find out what the readers know about these things. In answer to your postscript, it's difficult to know how many "homes" AU *goes to, because, for example, is a residential home one home or eight? Similarly, if I send 20 copies, do they get read by more or less than 20 people? So magazines talk about "circulation", which is the number successfully distributed. The circulation of* AU *is currently 9,100,*
Ed.

A review of the autism-friendly performance of *Beauty and the beast*

Sunday, the 9th January
at the Unicorn Theatre, London

by **Paul**

Beauty and the beast is a modern re-working of the fairytale, playing at the children's theatre, the Unicorn, close to London Bridge. A modern five-hundred-seater theatre in the round, I found it three-quarters full of autistic people and their parents.

The auditorium's lights were muted all through, the spotlights being adequate but not shining into the audience at any time. Sound levels were acoustic only, with any amplified sounds and speech blending in nicely and not being too overstimulating. Though some in the audience reacted when they saw the megaphone, it was turned down, so caused no more worries. The cast performed as if no stimming and crying out was happening, which worked well.

I came in late to the play, and thus missed the initial explanations and scene-settings at the start. I thought it would have benefitted from a single-page handout for anyone to take home, in order to more fully comprehend the show in case audience members were overwhelmed or unable to concentrate during it.

The theatre seats were adequate for space, giving plenty of room for squirming and stimming and the odd theatre exit. Quite a few children and parents needed to come and go throughout, mainly to toilets or to calm down. There was a quiet room with art materials and an audio link so that you could still hear the performance and not miss anything. Front-of-house staff were very friendly and helpful. A man came on at the end of act one to explain that there was an interval and other helpful details, and also appeared at the very end to do the same.

Overall the show was full of visual spectacles and each scene was an experience in itself, which I thought made it a good choice for people who may not be able to follow an overall narrative. The show was full of characters and events from ordinary life that would be valuable to people on the spectrum to both appreciate and recognise, and the cast told it well. Beauty was an ordinary girl, who came to earn the love of an alienated and misunderstood beast that usually frightened everyone else.

Towards the end of the second half, a beautiful silence fell on the audience as everyone focused and relaxed. This is a phenomenon I have seen before, where a big group of autistic people relax en mass and enjoy kinship.

For achieving that experience for everyone alone, I was glad to attend the show. The Access Manager was present, doing all she could to both assist the afternoon, and learn what else could be done to improve future shows. After it had ended, the show's cast came out and spoke to people who wanted to meet them.

My wife and I enjoyed our visit, and would be glad to go again. Staff worked as hard as they could to accommodate everyone, throughout and afterwards.

Work detail

by **Tom**

I have been having some thoughts about what worked for me in holding down a job whilst coping with all the social engagement issues that make the work place harder. I seem to have benefitted from a fascination with detail.

This owes a lot to special interests. I have always been happiest when absorbed in very detailed problem solving. Moreover, if the job has the right sort of detail in it, that usually has given me an advantage.

My main special interest is trying to make sense of undulations in the landscape, whether natural (geology), or man-made (archaeology). I see a lot of detail, which takes me hours to unravel. I have found that I don't see what is immediately obvious to others. I work from the particular to the general. I see things that are not immediately apparent that make a significant difference to understanding what's there.

I got into this way of doing things when at school. In an effort to make the most of the time between school and home I explored what I thought of as short-cuts. What I ended up doing was exploring every lane and alleyway, trying to make sense of patterns over a large area, often getting lost for hours, and without really making much sense of the geography.

As I didn't benefit from school (my contemporaries finding it was easy to trigger a melt-down), I had very little job success, but I came back into education in my twenties and got a doctorate. One of the first things to interest me was remote sensing. This was when satellite sensing was in its infancy, so most of the sensing devices were carried by aircraft. I became particularly interested in radar.

Any sensor uses part of the electromagnetic spectrum to record the surface of the earth or the planets. Even sensors operating in the visible spectrum don't see what we see with our eyes. But for sensors operating in the infra-red part of the spectrum, or radar or sonar, you have to understand what that sensor receives and convert it into information that is useful to humans. This means that you have to process a lot of detail in your head to be able to explain the information obtained. The conventional approach is to simplify this by classifying or generalising, and by using algorithms to filter out the complexity. The complexity for me was the magic.

During the early part of my career I somehow ended up in an engineering environment, even though I hadn't studied engineering. This started because I could explain to engineers what radar saw. This was in the context of forward-looking radar in the nose of an aircraft, looking at the ground. Radar is very useful but it doesn't always do what we want, and particularly it sometimes gives us too much information. The engineering approach was to fit a button that cropped the range of the information or applied an algorithm to simplify it. I spent many happy hours studying the flight paths along which problems had occurred, investigating the trigonometry involved in radar reflections from different features in the landscape. It took time, but I could confidently explain to an engineer why pressing the button didn't always get the desired results.

The radar work didn't last, but I then became involved in computer-generated map displays. I must confess my grasp of computers has never been good, but in engineering firms I found they would accommodate this if someone had special skills. Someone would work with me to cover any gaps in my knowledge. In those days, early 1980s, digital mapping was pixel based. Besides, pixel-based maps were easiest for engineers, and it was easy enough in principle to generate an algorithm to transfer the curved surface of the Earth onto a flat rectangular screen.

Where I found my advantage was in analysing the visual result. I found I could very quickly detect errors, and advise engineers of the need to make changes. I was also able to investigate and review how to present symbols and graphics in pixels without losing accuracy.

This was changing my approach to work. To be useful I had to be able to relate my complex world to others. I had to become a good communicator. I got better at writing and got plenty of practice proof-reading, where I was quicker to spot errors, or reviewing techniques and procedures where I could analyse and organise things clearly. I learned by necessity to be good at something I wasn't originally good at. The improved communications enabled me to make better use of my obsession with detail.

Things don't last though, and in the early 90s engineering was affected by recession. As a non-engineer I was very quickly out of a job. I had never been paid that well, as I wasn't eligible for engineer pay scales. But it had been an interesting time from which I gained a lot. Instead I moved into the field I had always wanted to do, where I remained the next twenty years: teaching.

Having mastered good communication, teaching became my future. However, I owe a lot to my special interests. Not because I ever earned any money pursuing my special interests, they always lost me money, but the fascination for detail they fulfilled became an important asset in getting a career. If there's detail in the work, it doesn't seem to matter so much that it's not the sort of work I'd rather be doing. Just finding something as absorbing made all the difference.

Dear friends,

re your review *Asperger syndrome and alcohol* by Tinsley and Hendricks (Oct. 2010). As an Aspie-alkie who has spent five years in recovery I am delighted to learn someone has "caught up with me" and made a link between Asperger's and alcoholism. When I was young I found alcohol seemed to level the social playing field somewhat, helped me to sleep, and also to blot out some of the pain and isolation which were my constant companions. By the time I was 40 I'd a serious problem which almost killed me in the end. I have long believed many undiagnosed autistic adults have turned to alcohol, along with sedative drugs like cannabis and heroin, and that many people are now trapped in addiction, or within the totally autism-unaware addiction treatment system. This is literally a matter of life and death and proper investigation of the links between autism and addiction is urgently needed. Maybe a worthwhile subject for an issue of "*United*".

Tashi delek!

Eric

If enough submissions are sent in, addiction will be a future theme. If not, then a selection of the letters sent in will appear in the next few issues, Ed.

If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for July will be **addiction** or **mental health**, with particular emphasis on the positives of being on the autism spectrum, if possible. Writing on any subject is still welcome, as are ideas for new themes, fillers (for putting in small spaces like this) and artwork. Remember, if you want to see different content in *AU*, the best way to change it is to send something in! The Editor was very glad to see this idea was taken to heart in the postbag for the current issue, and hopes that it will continue.

Dear *Asperger United,*

I am a proud sufferer of Asperger's syndrome and dyslexia.

I would like to feature in your magazine readers will learn something from my life story struggle. Twenty three years I lived unaware of my autism. I never had any help or support throughout my childhood, adolescence and early adulthood.

I battled extreme abuse, bullying, descrimination, ignorance, oppression, prejudices, racism and suppression. My only rescue and escape route was my greatest talent — my creative vision and my obsessive love for listening to music always came to my rescue.

July 2009 aged twenty four I was diagnosed with dyslexia this brought the discovery of my Autism. Thirteen months on I battled the realisation process and I faced more oppression, prejudices and suppression from society which dampened my spirits but my heart and spirit refused to give up on my battle for my freedom.

July finally this year I was diagnosed with Asperger's. Throughout my life I held onto one dream and one wish to gain a cultural belonging and identity. I was diagnosed a month before filming of my broadcast film a part of my Fixer's project campaign on Asperger's awareness.

September my project was launched and my broadcast film became hugely popular and my special website and forum for Asperger's sufferers was launched on broadcast day. It also became hugely popular. Several MPs as well as authorities, councils, employment, education, government, media and medical sectors across UK also tuned out to watch my broadcast film and view my website.

I became a Fixer volunteer Feb this year while battling my own obstacles trying to get an autism diagnosis as I was undiagnosed. I opted to help others who have Asperger's I made huge sacrafices and I worked 60 hours a week to my cause. September, October I had meetings with authorities they were amazed and fascinated with my life story struggle, reasons becoming a Fixer and my ideas on Asperger's awareness.

A lot of people including my allies and sources were amazed how I turned a negative into a positive in a short space of time since my diagnosis. I have achieved more within a short space of months than I ever achieved in my entire life the answer is I am finally free to understand the realism of my autism.

This month has been truly amazing and outstanding I was chosen to appear in new NHS Choices film on autism diagnosis. I also won a Vinspired Regional Award — The Triumph Award Against Adversity. I will be battling on to win a major national award next year in London for all my hard work. Above all set an example to others who have Asperger's that things can be accomplished against the odds through sheer belief, courage, hope, inspiration and hard work.

I will be battling on gaining as much media coverage ie. television and radio as well as news papers and magazine coverage as possible to win a major award next year. I honestly feel your readers will gain an insight into Asperger's. Several members of NAS travelled from London to Alton Towers on film day back in August. One of my NAS Media contacts was there and a member appeared on my broadcast film.

Asperger's need passionate heroes and patriots who emerged against the odds who will be role models to the future of Asperger's. The answer for the future of Asperger's is late diagnosed sufferers who break down the barriers to inspire others and I am the person.

Graeme

Aspie people
With disorder
Do have something
They shouldn't oughta!

They live life
In quite a maze
Sometimes everything
Is a haze

Fear of
Being by one's self
Can block out
Anything else

But it's the old adage
"Chin up high"
Aspie People
Reach The Sky!

Thomas

Monday

by **Daniel**

Monday morning
Back to work
Cider stains on my shirt
Tired
Wired
Wired for sound
Keeping the weekend's habits down
Back to work
In a tired old state
Can't wait for Monday to be done
Monday has no sun
Is scared of everyone
And if only I can wait for Tuesday's light
I might see Monday right
Then my week will begin
Inside my head a cider grin
But if I drink too much again
I might feel Monday's pain

House rules

by **Jodi Picoult**

ISBN: 978 0 34097 907 5

£7.99 / $15.95 Hodder

review by **Neil**

Like *The curious incident of the dog in the night-time* (Mark Haddon), this book is about a teenage boy with AS who finds himself caught up in a crime. Unlike *The curious incident*, however, this is a meticulously researched book that will ring 100% authentic not only to people with AS but also their family and those who know them.

Written from several first-person perspectives, including those of Jacob (a teen with AS whose intense interest is forensics and a programme clearly based on CSI), his mother, brother, tutor, police detective and a newly qualified lawyer, this book offers an excellent insight into how Aspies are perceived by others and in particular how we can intend one thing but it is seen as something completely different in NT eyes.

When Jacob's tutor disappears and is subsequently found dead, his AS behaviours start to look a lot like psychopathic criminal traits and he finds himself caught up in the nightmare of the criminal justice system — something that is all too common for Aspies.

His lawyer, Oliver, is on a steep learning curve about both AS and criminal law, but he knows he must play the "AS card" as the basis of an insanity plea as the only way to keep Jacob out of prison. For Jacob, however, this is tantamount to an admission of guilt — and he knows he is not guilty.

A fast-paced, gripping read with an authentic insight into the trauma that results when the worlds of AS and the criminal justice system collide, I thoroughly recommend this book to you all!

Walking in my shoes

What's it like to have mild autism?

A news story by **Natalie**

I am doing a part time creative writing course at a local adult learning centre. As part of the course we learnt about journalism and for our homework we each had to write a news story about our own life. This is my own, about growing up and suffering with autism.

Being a slow learner isn't always easy, especially if you have a learning disability but it does not mean you are stupid. Take me for instance, although to many people, like friends and family, I may look normal, I see the world differently to everyone else.

Like with most things it takes me a while to learn stuff as it does not always click straight away. There are also times when I find it hard to remember stuff or even socialise with other people. But worst of all I find it quite stressful when someone shouts and curses in my presence as I find it very offensive. I don't like it. This is because I have some sort of autism, which is in a mild form but it wasn't until I started school in the second year that I maybe thought something was wrong, because when I went back to school I was kept in the class with the new children and all my friends moved up a year.

That was also when my parents started having meetings with teachers and school officials to try and find out what my problem was and then my parents had to fight to get me in a special needs school. At one stage my dad thought that one school was so bad for me that he had to take me out and keep me home for six months. It was only because my dad wrote to the local councillor when I was 13 that I finally found a school to suit my needs.

However, when I was ready to leave school I was told I wasn't ready to go to college straight away, because the headmaster suggested I should go to a school to learn how to be independent. It was from there that I wanted to do art and design and to live life like anyone else.

Now I am older I am focusing on creative writing and I think everyone like me should never give up on their dreams just because they have a learning disability; everyone has a right to fulfil their ambitions no matter what.

Late

by **Natalie**

Quick, Quick

Rush, Rush

Or you'll be late

Late for what?

You be late for school

And I be late for work.

Dear ***Asperger United*****,**

for your “sensory experiences” theme I thought it would be appropriate to send you the enclosed photograph of my friend Gemma and I on a recent visit to “Puzzling Place”, an interactional, hands-on optical illusion museum in Keswick, in the Lake District.

It’s packed full of stimulating, mind-bending and quirky trick-of-the-mind mysterious fun! Including an anti-gravity room, holograms, hypnotic spinning spiral and a room that makes you appear larger and smaller than life. The museum is guaranteed good-value fun for everyone, both young and old. My friend and I are both 26, and we seemed to be having more fun than the children who were there! I have ADHD and Asperger’s syndrome and would definitely recommend Puzzling Place for anyone with or without a learning disability. It is a sensory heaven!

Kind regards,

Carly

Carly (standing on the chair) with Gemma “behind” her

Bearing grudges, having regrets or feeling sorry for one’s self for traumas of the past is a total waste of precious energy, just as it is to worry or to have fears for the future. Yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, today is a gift — a present of the present. Your energy used as a present in the present — in the now — is totally potent and can manifest truly magical results!

Tracey

The Asperger-Mystic

by **Martyn Jacobs**

of Liverpool

Anyone who has ever had a connection with spirituality, will know how simple the ultimate truths are, but also how difficult they are to achieve in practice.

Amongst the highest aims, is living in the present. There are of course varying degrees of "being present", and to be in a permanent state of present awareness, is normally considered to be in a more or less enlightened state.

Of course, anyone who has achieved this highest state, will have outgrown their so called attachments to earthly things. That is, they have a "detached" state of mind.

This enables them to not be "moved" by earthly matters, and to live in a more or less meditative state.

Such a person will never do things in haste. They will do things in their own time, never rushing to get to the future, they will choose, at the deepest level, how fast they do things, not being swayed by attachments to outcome, and certainly not affected by others' expectations, which are really attachments.

Of course, such a person will be revered by all, and held up as an example of the inner beauty which comes with total realisation —

Or would they?

Well, for example, if you met one of these enlightened beings in a traffic jam:

Remember, they never do anything in haste.

Having much more patience than unenlightened beings, they would do everything at a much more relaxed and slower tempo.

So would this driver be revered by all the other drivers?

Imagine, driving to work one morning, and this enlightened being, this perfect example of spirituality, just happened to be in front of you in their car, perfectly relaxed, and in a meditative state, whilst still being extremely aware — in fact, much more aware than those of us who do everything in haste.

Would you immediately see the inner beauty in such a person?

The Asperger-Mystic, having a greater awareness of the "present", has a slower "subjective time". This in turn will cause outside events to appear faster.

"Normal" social activity is often too fast for the Asperger-Mystic to comfortably and effectively join in at that speed. Drivers become impatient and many people wonder why they take so long just doing normal tasks.

The simple answer is that:

(a) They are in no rush, and

(b) Their passage of time is much slower — to them, others are way too fast.

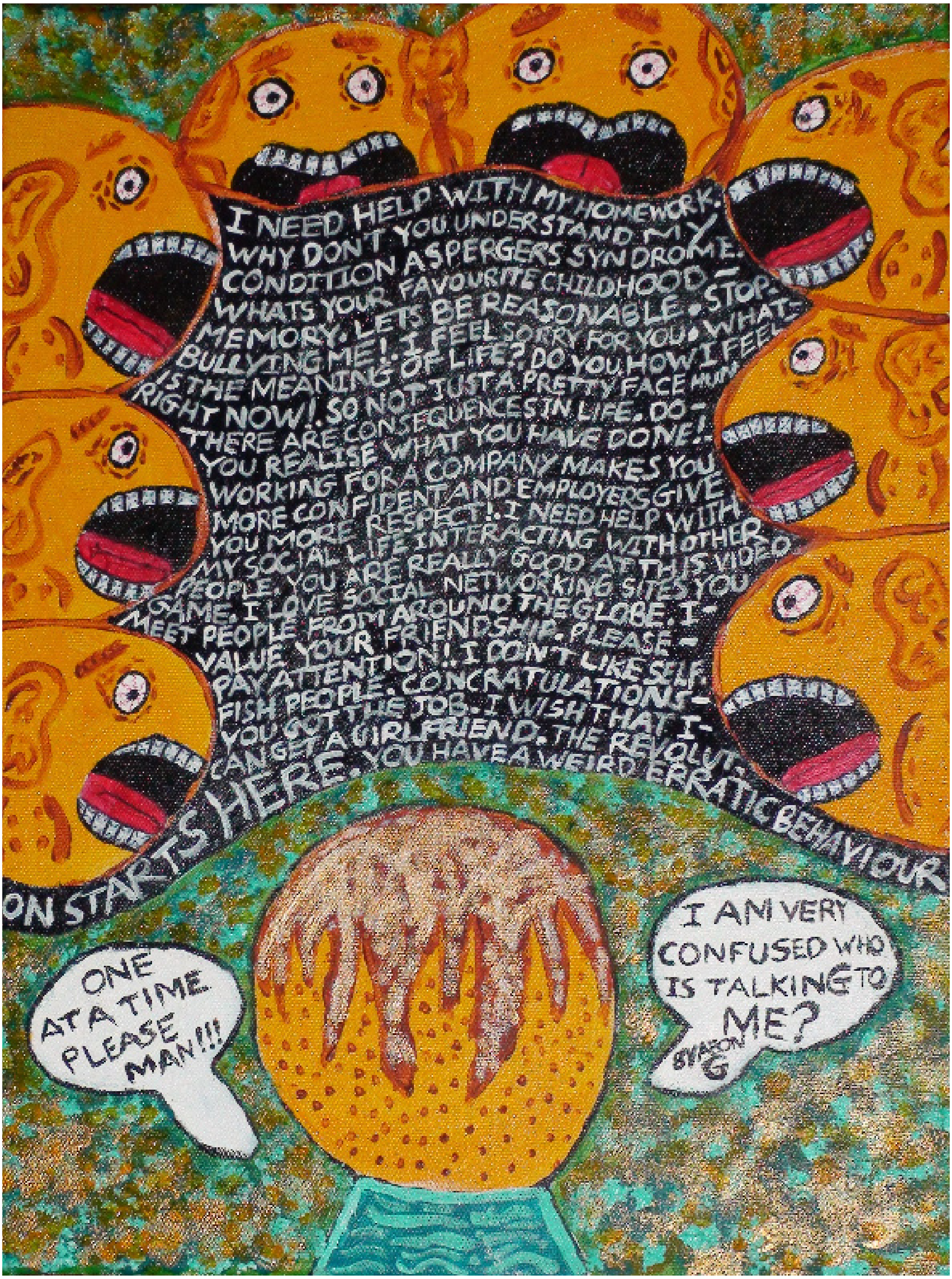
If we extrapolate this and imagine what happens if the Asperger-Mystic is totally in the present, we will find that "outside time" speeds up to infinity.

This is the case with "Light", because light is infinitely time-dilated.

The Asperger-Mystic is "enlightened", but only to an extent.

Confusion jungle

by **Aron**



Autscape
An *autistic* conference

near Pontefract, West Yorkshire

Monday 22 – Thursday 25
August 2011

An annual residential conference and retreat organised for and by autistics.

This year's theme is *Owning Autism*.

- Autistic-friendly environment
- Meet others with Asperger's and autism
- Non-autistics also welcome
- Workshops and presentations
- Leisure activities
- Quiet location
- Childcare available
- Stay in listed Georgian buildings
- Plenty of outdoor space
- Affordable registration fee
- Full board — 3 meals and tea/coffee breaks included in price.

Registration is expected to open late April.

Information, communication and registration:

Website: **www.autscape.org**

Email: **info@autscape.org**

Post:
Autscape
24 Anson Road
Upper Cambourne
Cambridgeshire
CB23 6DQ

Dear *AU*,

thank you for my new and shiny colour edition of *AU* — it's really cool.

I only wish I could contribute something to *AU* but it seems that all I am good at is knitting.

Yes, my passion for knitting. Being on the spectrum and experiencing great difficulties in taking on people verbally in life, I believe everyone should take up a rewarding hobby (or two or three!). Being female, it's easier for me to sew, knit, embroider — to name but a few — but the loveliest, yes striking, most vivid embroidery I've seen was done by a man. So come on men, you can do these things too.

To get back to my knitting, I've been writing my own patterns from scratch for ten or more years. I started in a small way, writing charity patterns and desktop-publishing them at home. These patterns were then sold in my local wool shop and all monies donated to charity. Of late I have gone a bit bigger and published a book: *Knitted Wild Animals*, published by the Guild of Master Craftsman Publications. I am now working on various knit designing and hoping to compile another book soon. If there is anything along the knitting line I can do for *AU* then let me know. Knitted toys and ornaments are what fascinates me and whether it's a snowman or a monkey with a banana I'm designing for others to recreate, everybody's effort is unique and the finished piece a personality of its own.

I hope I've shared my enthusiasm for handicrafts, especially knitting, as boring days can be turned into wholesome days when engaging in creative activity. I'd be interested to read about anyone's creativity/achievements in the field of arts and crafts in future *AU*s — share what you do and how you do it.

All the best

Sarah

The rules of *Asperger United*

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

1) *Asperger United* is funded by the NAS and readers' donations, and is independent of the NAS. Although it is called "*Asperger United*" it aims to cover the whole of the (reading) autism spectrum. That is, the concerns and joys of any subscriber on the spectrum can be printed, not just Asperger's.

2) Pieces that appear in *AU* are credited using the author's first name only, unless the author requests something different. This is done to protect your privacy.

3) *Asperger United* administers the copyright of everything that appears and it does this on behalf of the authors.

4) *AU* does not use your contact details for anything other than administering *AU*. Your details are not passed on to NAS Marketing, NAS Fundraising or any other organisation without your written permission.

5) If you move house, please inform *AU* and include your old address as well as your new address.

6) Even if you've paid for the Royal Mail forwarding service (or another forwarding service if you live outside Great Britain and Northern Ireland), you still need to inform *Asperger United* that you have moved address.

7) If you want to unsubscribe, inform *AU* and include your address.

8) If you want to resubscribe (or subscribe for the first time) inform *Asperger United* and include your postal address.

9) If you phone and leave a message on the machine, please speak slowly and clearly and spell uncommon words, as sometimes the line isn't very clear. Please give any phone number you leave twice for the same reason. Remember to give your postal address so that we can find you in our records.

10) The current edition of *AU* is available at **www.autism.org.uk/aspergerunited** You need to scroll down to near the bottom of the page, where there is a link to the PDF.

11) You do not have to be a member of the NAS to subscribe to *Asperger United.*

12) Book reviews are the most popular thing in *AU*, please consider submitting one. They can be about any book, not just books about autism. Also, they do not have to be short (the Goth keeps most of his reviews short to leave more space for other writers). If you do not want your review to appear in the NAS section of the Amazon website, please make this clear.

13) Although each issue is themed, submissions on any subject are welcome. Only some of the letters and articles in each issue will follow the theme. All submissions may be edited, especially for privacy, libel, and for fitting the space available.

Asperger United

The National Autistic Society

Dear *Asperger United*,

I've been a subscriber for some years now. It's great to hear what other people with autism are up to. But I'm finding more and more with each issue it's about how people have treated people with autism. I've experienced people treating me differently because of my autism whether they knew I had it or not, but I'd like to have more positive stories in the magazine to help up lift us all and not drag us down. As it makes me feel "what's the point in even trying" after I've read the magazine.

I'll start off. I really enjoy photography. I like creating something I enjoy looking at and making memories that I can always look back on as I have a photo of them. It's also something I can do at my own pace when doing still life or to try and help me learn how to interact and communicate when I'm shooting a model. As I enjoy it so much I decided to submit some of my images to magazines and competitions. So far I've had multiple publications in five international magazines, have been in bookazines, have been the editor's choice and have won three competitions.

When I first submitted, I never thought they'd use any of the images but they used two in one issue of the magazine. The feeling I felt when I went in the shop and saw my images in print was amazing. I thought it might just be a one-off but that magazine and others just keep accepting and printing them. I've had people recognise my work from the magazines and have been told I've inspired them to try and recreate my images but they just don't seem able to.

I want people who struggle with autism to know that you can be special in whatever you do. And even with our difficulties we can do what we dream to do.

I've included a self-portrait of what autism feels like to me. The hands are to show the frustration, the tears the confusion and the jigsaw piece the loneliness and isolation I can feel.

Yours sincerely,

Emma

Emma's photo is on the cover. I couldn't agree more with Emma's sentiments and look forward to everybody's contributions, Ed.

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