

AU ASPERGER UNITED

Produced by and for people with autism and Asperger syndrome

No. 18 Autumn 1998



IN THIS ISSUE

Regular News | **Letters to the Editor** | **Pen Pal Network** |
Features including employment | **Talent section** including
poems, drawings and Part Three of the short story by Thomas
Simmons





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

Asperger United is produced by an editorial group consisting of:

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Additional Support from The
National Autistic Society

Subscriptions

Annual subscription:
£4 (4 issues per year).
Please make cheques payable to:
The National Autistic Society.

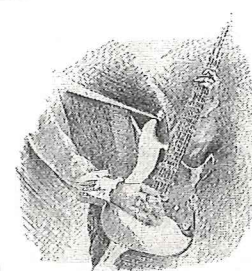
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393 City Road
London EC1V 1NG

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*Asperger United***

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One of
George's
illustrations

**Thank you to George Cox who
kindly produced the Pen Pal
Network and Talent Scout
illustrations.**



***Asperger United* logos by
Graeme Lawson.
Thank you Graeme.**

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the latest edition of your magazine and thank you to all contributors.

I hope you all had good holidays and that some of you have been able to describe them for the magazine as I have.

In May 2000, a European Autism Conference is to be held in Glasgow, my birth place, and I would like your agreement on whether Asperger syndrome should be included on the agenda and, if so, suggest a speaker or speakers.

I have just taken the final exam of year two of my Open University French course. Maybe those of you involved in further and higher

education will let us know of your progress.

Any reader who has successfully contacted a penpal anywhere in the world is invited to write to us about it.

In this editions News section there is a draft proposal to Autism Europe on including Asperger syndrome in the conference agenda.

As this is the last edition of this year, I wish all readers a happy Christmas and fulfilling New Year.

God bless you all.

**Your editor,
John Joyce**



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Seeking information for future editions

We are requesting further articles on the following topics for future editions of *Asperger United*.

Employment

- Getting, keeping, advancing in and changing jobs
- Losing employment, failing to get a job/new job
- Financial, social considerations stemming from unemployment

All readers with or without jobs may be able to contribute to this section.

Relationships

- Marriage
- Divorce
- Sexual relationships (failures and successes!)
- Making relationships
- Girlfriends
- Boyfriends
- Health and sex issues

Further Education

- A'Levels
- University courses
- College courses
- Problems with funding
- Problems at University

Disabled People - Travel Concessions

Printed here is a copy of the letter John Joyce, your Editor, recently sent to the Government Minister Paul Boateng.

Paul Boateng MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Boateng,

I am registered disabled with Asperger syndrome and, as a member of a social skills group, I took part in a survey at our recent group meeting on the various ways persons with autism and Asperger syndrome are treated by the relevant transport or health authorities with regard to travel concessions. Of the twelve people attending the meeting, seven have 'Freedom

Passes' allowing free travel, Disabled Person's Railcards are held by three members and the other two, including myself, get no concessions.

Please let us know Government policy on travel concessions for the disabled. Do people with my disability qualify for any form of travel concessions or are they only for those with visible disabilities, such as blindness or impaired mobility? Is the granting of concessions at the discretion of local authorities or travel companies?

If necessary will you discuss the matter with your colleagues in The Department of Transport.

Yours sincerely,

John Joyce

Autisme Europe - Conference 2000

Printed below is another letter from your Editor, John Joyce, to Autisme Europe on behalf of the Asperger Social Skills Group.

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the leaflet you sent a few months ago. I would like to suggest a subject for discussion at the Conference. As a member of an Asperger syndrome social skills group, I hope you can include this subject on the agenda. If you cannot find a suitable speaker to front this session I can suggest one unfortunately without her consent - Professor Patricia Howlin of St George's Hospital, London. I hope you can answer me in the affirmative.

Yours faithfully,
John Joyce

Worldwide Autism Association

Information from Patrick Frey, Founder and *Bottlemail* Editor

When I learnt about my autism at the age of sixteen I started the first penpalships with other autistic people. The first three came from England and Northern Ireland. Later I got contacts in other countries too. These contacts are very important for me.

This gave me the idea to found an organisation for penpalships for people with autism spectrum disorders and also to publish a newsletter. I started to build up the Autistic Penpal Club in 1995 and reached people in some western European countries, the USA and Australia. In 1997 I published the 0-number of *Bottle-mail*. This was the time I decided I needed more help with my work and also couldn't continue paying the costs myself. The Autistic Penpal Club had to be

put on a better base. I found some people who helped me with the project and on 27 June 1998 we had the founding assembly of the Worldwide Autism Association.

Who can join the Worldwide Autism Association? Everyone with an autism spectrum disorder. You can join us as soon as you can read and write and you're never too old to join. You'll receive a protected penpal directory and can put yourself on it and you'll receive *Bottle-mail*, our newsletter of course. We publish it irregularly a few times a year. Every member can write articles for it.

We also want to inform the public about autism. We do this by spreading an information brochure. It also contains an application form for members and sponsors. We plan

to organise international meetings in the future.

If you want to become a member of our organisation order the information brochure which contains the application form. The annual membership fees are Sfr. 15. Our address is:

Worldwide Autism Association
Postfach
CH-8052 Zurich
Switzerland

People without an autism spectrum disorder can become sponsors of the Worldwide Autism Association. You will also receive *Bottle-mail*. Sponsors determine the amount of their annual contribution themselves. If you want to become a sponsor write to the above address.

A week on the shores of Lake Erie

by John Joyce

Early in the New Year my American cousin Tricia Donovan wrote telling us she had planned a 'Murray Coyne Reunion', based on all of her relatives on her father's side of the house, the name 'Murray' being her own maiden name and 'Coyne' that of her paternal grandmother, a sister of my mother. I made the mad decision to go and wrote a letter to Tricia so informing her.

Having arranged my travel with 'Trailfinders' and insurance with 'Boots', I travelled from Heathrow Terminal 3 on 30 June at 6.30pm arriving at JFK Airport in New York at 9.30pm local time. I had travelled via New York because there are no direct flights to Cleveland. Arriving at New York, I was met by an uncle, also my godfather, who lives in New York. I spent that night at his home, leaving at 7.15 am the next day in order to take the Cleveland flight at 9.15 am. I arrived at Hopkins International Airport at 11.30 am on 1 July. Being met at Cleveland Airport by a cousin, Rev. Cornelius Murray, I was first driven to his presbytery in the suburb of North Olmstead. There, his brother-in-law, Charles 'Killer' Conrad met me and he took me to his family home in Lorain and I stayed there for a couple of days. During my stay, my cousin Mary, 'Killer's' wife, also played host to some of her own children, notably, the youngest David, his young lady and their children.

With 'Killer' I took a walk to the lake on the first day I spent at his home. The second day some of us present for the big event went to a Slovak restaurant for lunch. That evening, on Friday 3 July, we went to a theatre some distance away where Joe Conrad, another son of 'Killer' and Mary, made his hometown debut as a stand-up comedian. Much of his material was based on the Cleveland 'Browns', a defunct local American Football

Club and comments on his wife Becky. Joe lives in California where he has already made his name on stage.

Independence - 4 July

Saturday 4 July dawned; This was the day selected for the great part. This began at lunchtime and lasted the rest of the day. It was held in a major local park. A firm of local caterers provided the food for the meals which began and ended the celebration. In fact, from the moment the lunch began food was available until approximately 7pm in the park. Apart from the meal there were other diversions during the afternoon. The young children played their own games. A video was made by Mimi, wife of cousin Mike, another member of the main Murray family. Some of the younger set spent part of the afternoon on the volleyball court.

After the evening meal, we left the park, some moving to one of the hotels occupied by people at the party and gathering at the swimming pool. At the end of the day I moved to stay with an aunt, resident in Cleveland. One of her sons and his family also stayed that night.

Sunday 5 July:

A further spiritual and corporal celebration

Whereas the previous day had been organised by the Murray side, the activities this day were organised by the Coyne's. A Coyne cousin, the second son of the aunt with whom I was then staying, was the brains behind the day in his local park. Jim arranged with Fr Connie (Cornelius) to celebrate a Mass in the park. This gave the opportunity for the children to show their skills reading and serving. At the end of the service I received an unexpected tribute for being the only person present who did not live in the US. After Mass we had a meal followed by some

entertainment, including Irish dancing by some of the younger people. Games were played, soccer and volleyball in particular. Among my cousins, English football is as popular as its American counterpart. Some of us finished this Sunday at Jim Coyne's home.

Monday 6 July

This was my last day in the US. I stayed overnight with my Aunt Sarah Coyne, widow of one of my uncles. During this day I walked a little in the area of West Cleveland. I then went to a small park with my aunt her daughters and some of their children. The children went swimming in the park pool. Returning to my aunt's home, I awaited the arrival of my chauffeur, Cousin Jim, for the short ride to the airport. I took a flight out of Cleveland at 8.10pm for O'Hare Field in Chicago, from which I travelled to London, leaving at 9.45pm Central Standard Time, and arriving at Heathrow at 11.30am the following day BST.

Although this is a very sketchy report, I hope somebody is interested.

If anyone had been interested in seeing photographs of my holiday, I am sorry that the button which ensured the movement of the film was jammed and no pictures came out.

Travel:

Please send in details of holidays you have arranged or gone on unaccompanied.

Be sure to include details of how you booked, where you stayed, how you managed and marks out of ten for enjoyment and recommendation.

Don't ask me, I'm a stranger here

by Andrew Walker

I was in the Cairngorms one winter's evening descending from the Northern Corries after a good day's ice climbing. This is an activity which is rather like hitting yourself over the head with a hammer - its nice when you stop. I was therefore feeling pleasantly relieved to be going home, in this case across the snowfields of Coire Cas used by downhill skiers above their strategically placed restaurant at White Lady. I had left my spiked crampons on my boots not or grip but because of the malicious pleasure it gave me to mess up the snow of their carefully prepared piste. Well, it's the skiers after all who have messed up the environment with their awful pylons and skiing paraphernalia and bulldozed access roads.

So anyway, there I was descending through the cloud and driving snow when a fluorescent pink blob started to appear out of the dusk. It turned out to be a woman in a 'loud' ski suit. She had lost her skis and poles and she was lying on her stomach, holding on to a wooden post like her life depended upon it. It probably did. She had that look in her eyes that seemed to show a state of resignation which is far beyond fear; rather like the condition animals are in when you come to extricate them from snow drifts or else when they've jammed themselves between boulders. She appeared to be lost in every sense of the word. It was as if she could not comprehend the nature of the world of rock and ice and blizzard she suddenly realised she was in. I have also seen that 'look' in people I have come across on other expeditions.

I remember the same 'look' on the faces of people sitting unmoving in the snow one night near

Crianlarich in the Highlands. One side of their car had been ripped off after the driver had lost control, abruptly spilling people and their belongings out of their 'sitting-room' environment into the harsh reality of Rannoch Moor in the depths of winter.

So what on earth have my climbing reminiscences got to do with the lives of people reading *Asperger United* in the wilds of suburbia? It is relevant because I have seen exactly the same distant 'look' of incomprehension in the eyes of people at social functions, in the eyes of autistic and Asperger people that is. It's almost as though autistic people are simply lacking the terms of reference to comprehend the point or relevance of certain social events with themselves.

As a formally diagnosed autistic person myself I can say that this is precisely the case. Unlike the fortunate skier, the physical world around us makes perfect sense to me, and also to most of you who are like me. However, the same cannot be said of activities such as spending enormous amounts of money getting drunk or working my way up the social ladder for its own sake. Maybe it's just a case of horses for courses, as if you and me are living in a separate reality. So what is so bad about that? I never judge people on their ability to climb mountains so why on earth should people judge you and me on our ability to climb the social ladder?

New group - Time Out Family Trust

A new group for young adults with autism and Asperger syndrome has been formed in the Greater Manchester area. The group meets once a month on a Sunday afternoon for an informal chat and opportunity to meet new people. In addition, the group also arrange trips out and social events. New faces are always welcome.

If anyone is interested in more information then contact Janine Arnott on 0161 864 1912.

Association Espoir

Your editor, John Joyce, has been in contact with the Association Espoir in Nigeria. Association Espoir have just created two classes for 69 people with autism. John has requested more information from the Association and we hope to be able to report more in the future.

New NAS Website to be launched

The National Autistic Society's new website on the Internet is to be launched on the 30 November.

The new website has a section devoted to people with autistic spectrum disorders which will include personal accounts, recommended reading and useful links to other websites. It is hoped this section will be developed over time.

If you have any ideas about how the section for people with autistic spectrum disorders could be developed, would like to submit a personal account or offer information about other useful websites for example, then please write to:

Information Centre

The National Autistic Society,
393 City Road,
London EC1V 1NG
Email: webeditor@nas.org.uk

About my life *by Steve van Dulken*

I realised that I had Asperger syndrome in May 1998 when I read about Angela Browning taking time off to be with her son. I was 45.

After many years of isolation and being a doormat for others, and slowly realising that something was seriously wrong and that it was not just extreme shyness, it was least a relief to be able to put a name to it and to recognise the symptoms. I have diagnosed myself as a 'high-achieving AS person'.

There is so much I would like to write about; how, aged 12, I was made to do the same year over again in school for 'emotional immaturity' and how the teacher said to me 'You don't mind, do you?'. I would have spent a further year in the same class, I was told many years later, if my parents had not refused.

Or I could write about the frequent scorn and anger I encountered from others because of my poor physical co-ordination and my lack of social graces. 'Are you stupid or something' is the obvious thought in their eyes - little do they realise that it is indeed 'something'. I still have to endure long speeches from others urging me to learn to drive, apparently in the belief that everyone has the obligation to go out and kill pedestrians. I can merely utter excuses about not needing a car.

For some reason I did, however, interview well. Well enough for me to be put in charge of 42 people when promoted from being a clerk. You can imagine how much I enjoyed that.

Things began to look up when 11 years ago I applied for another post on promotion in the library where I work. Patents are a very technical area, and I suspect that I got the job largely because no one else wanted it. As I built up my knowledge in

this specialist field I found that people were looking up to me as an expert, and my confidence grew. I already knew that I enjoyed that I enjoyed helping people who were trying to use the library, and the job meant that I did a lot of it.

I frequently give talks in my field (I was terrified at first) and attend conferences. I have also edited respected books in the field, and I have written a book on how to use old patents for information which will be published soon.

As part of the growth since then I have had first one and then a second long term girlfriend. She chooses possible clothes and shoes for me and I select from them what I like. The result is that I dress far better (for a start I used to wear everything a size too small). The relationship means a lot to me, although I think she sometimes wonders if it does.

I still hate small talk as I see most conversations as meaningless unless they are about culture or practical problems, but I have learnt to ask people about how their football team is doing or whatever. I am now reacting when, for example, asked about my holiday plans by responding 'how about you'. I suspect that I have reached my limit in how I can change.

Although I sometimes feel down I do now feel a kind of peace in what I have achieved. I am more thoughtful about others who may suffer from a variety of problems, not just AS (though I can diagnose others in my workplace with the same problems). When I retire I

would like to help others with AS. Psychologists may talk about people lacking social skills but they do not know the anguish many of us go through daily.

Although I sometimes feel down I do now feel a kind of peace in what I have achieved. I am more thoughtful about others who may suffer from a variety of problems

Calling all feature writers

Please do send in articles about your experiences, hobbies and interests.

We are keen to include articles 'about your lives' in further editions of *Asperger United*.

Please send all articles to The Editor, *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.
Fax 0171 833 9666.

Please send all letters to: **Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society,**
393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG. Fax 0171 833 9666

Dear Asperger United,

At present I am enduring a stage of my life whereby I am attempting to heal the communication anxieties which have meant so much to me, in an incredibly deep and meaningful way, in terms of not being able to form close loving relationships and the like. One element of my situation, quite separate from the relationships I wish to be able to form, but nonetheless I have thought about as I analyse my situation as a whole on the road to recovery, is that I have never been able to form a close emotional bond with my mother. She had an old fashioned upbringing and her emotions were not really discussed, as she has an easily depressive disposition which makes it harder for her. I have had a slightly different and more casual upbringing than my Mum, as did my Dad with whom I share some closeness. Therefore, I feel there is a genetic link between me and my Mum. Sadly there is a pretty near 100% inability for me and my Mum to embrace, or share any kind of physical affection, although there is no violence between us, it is more a case of what isn't there. I have been thinking a lot about this recently as I have been thinking about my problems on the hopeful road to recovery, and this has resulted in the reality that it has really become a mental ever presence for me when in Mum's presence. The knowledge of our inability to share any physical closeness, to a pretty near total degree, has also placed extra stress upon the insecurities inside me. This is, without doubt, related to not having the physical and emotional bonds (which are the case in most 'normal' people). My situation has been a priority, as I attempt to heal my problems in a major way, and I have been more and more aware of

how everything fits into the big picture I am trying to solve. In a fit of distress a few weeks ago I really nourished these feelings of insecurity in an unhealthy way. The result of this has been that I feel weakly binded inside, as if emotions and those things which make us stable people, have actually become more loosely fastened than they were before. The experience of feeling distressed, and this newly worsened feeling, comes out especially when I am under stress. I hope it will never feed a bad temper.

I have no doubt that these problems in the first place relate to the Asperger syndrome I suffer from, but I have sadly managed to make them worse recently. As I have just described - having done my best to describe them in words if anyone else knew about or knew of these kinds of problems - what kinds of rationalisations, approaches or treatments are the right ones?

One thing I would like to add about the situation between me and my mother is that, I was not strictly suggesting I want the bond fully reinstated, but more to the point I would like advice on how I have become aware of it in my Mum's presence more than before.

I apologise for asking advice on several things in one letter, but at the moment I feel the need to put my mind straight about several issues so I can face the future knowing they have been handled correctly by myself.

The one final thing I would like to mention is the anxiety I have to forming close relationships with the opposite sex, due to the barriers which I know, over time, will heal. However, the sheer magnitude of physical emotion I feel in this department is extremely phenomenal to say the least. All I would really like here is advice on

how to handle such powerful emotions and the knowledge of what is at stake for me in terms of successfully overcoming these problems.

Like I said, I have mentioned several problems in this letter but if anyone feels they can offer advice or suggest treatment to do with any aspect mentioned I would be warmly grateful as a general feeling of negative pessimism has sadly got into me.

Richard Sheils

Reply from the Editor

Thank you for your letter. I think you are expressing several of the conflicting feelings experienced by people with Asperger syndrome - and those of many 'ordinary' mortals! If this is of concern to you I think you need to speak to your GP to see if you can get help in resolving this conflict. Counselling or family therapy may help.

Dear Asperger United,

Might it be an idea for an email alias to be set up for the magazine? A list address such as:
as.utd@nas.org.uk

This would enable people to have a canonical email address, and could facilitate easier communication with the editors.

What does everyone think?
Alex Cockell

Reply from the Editor

Thank you for your contribution. It is our hope that one day we will be on email. I hope to have my own personal email address at some future date also.



In reply to the debate on Psychotherapy and people with Asperger syndrome

Dear *Asperger United*,

I would like to respond to Tim Loder's letter in November 97's newsletter and John Brookes in May 98's.

I should preface this by explaining my view: whatever those of us with Asperger syndrome have in common, it is clear that they often appear to be at least as different from each other as people without Asperger's! Whatever people with Asperger syndrome may share should not be taken for granted.

It is possible that Asperger syndrome is a bit like a family; any one member of the family may have those characteristic 'eyes', or perhaps the 'hair', 'posture' or some other feature, but it is very unlikely that every member of the family has every single 'family characteristic', although they do share some things, the set of things that they share is not the same for each person.

Tim Loder wrote of his negative experiences of group psychotherapy, and John Joyce in his Editor's reply asked: 'If anyone has any experience of psychotherapy... then please write in'.

I have benefited from a particular kind of psychotherapy called 'psychoanalysis'. I don't suppose it will surprise readers with Asperger

syndrome to learn that because of the value that psychoanalysis has had for me, I became a psychoanalyst.

If you are interested in psychotherapy then you should be aware that there are many very different kinds on offer. Take this as a kind of consumer warning!

The kind of psychoanalysis that I practice (Lacanian) stresses the unique difficulties that each of us have had, and what they mean in that individual's life. There is a focus on studying each client's speech, and working at the client's pace. Beware of therapists who offer to 'educate' you by telling you what you should do or feel, instead of listening to what you say and helping you to explore your own issues.

This kind of therapy is not easy to do, and usually takes a long time. We all have our own private demons, or 'skeletons in the cupboard'. In psychoanalysis you get to know them better, and even to dance with them. Later, if you want, you can out them back.

John Brookes seems to have tried a 'self-help approach' to psychoanalysis, and has clearly done much reading. But psychoanalysis is not 'self-help': it can only be carried out with the cooperation of a trained psychoanalyst who will have done a significant amount of work in his own analysis.

Choosing a psychoanalyst is a bit like finding somewhere to live: Do you feel comfortable with them? Is the location practical? Is the price right?

The largest register of psychoanalysts or 'psychoanalytic psychotherapists' is probably held by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy.

The email and address of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy is:

ukcp@psychotherapy.org.uk

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy
167-169 Great Portland Street
London W1N 5FB

The UKCP also hold a registers of the details of many other kinds of therapists that have little or nothing to do with psychoanalysis, so if you would like them to send you a list of psychoanalysts in your area, rather than some other type of therapist such as a hypnotist, then ask them.

If you think that you are interested in the type of psychoanalysis I have written about and would like me to refer you to someone in your area, or if you would like to discuss any of this further please feel free to contact me at: ph@philiphill.demon.co.uk
Tel: 0181 340 9941.

Philip Hill

Reply from the Editor

Thanks for this letter. It is interesting to note that psychoanalysis can result in people taking up that activity. I think however that people need to be warned that psychoanalysis requires great commitment of time over many years and can be expensive. One also needs to consider the value of other therapies, such as group therapy and counselling. Psychotherapy and psychoanalysis is certainly not an answer for everyone.



letters to the editor

In reply to Antony Cresswell, in Edition 17

Dear *Asperger United*,

Further to the survey listed in a past issue, and the plan to comment on sexuality and how it impinges on the Aspie, may I give a few comments from my life?

I agree with Anthony Cresswell that this area desperately needs to be looked into, as I'm another twentysomething Aspie who has either had nothing or no joy in the area of relationships. Especially since the 'rules of the game' as taught or talked about seem to imply that double-bluff is used alot. This seems to be out of the reach of most of us. How many of us lie? Or would 'press an attack' if we received a negative statement?

On the whole relationship front, I have been a brother to some ladies, but I have mostly been used otherwise; most recently, I was someone's rebound, then one other lady wanted to 'introduce' me to the sexual sphere. I declined at the last minute, since I believe that two people make critical changes to each other's psyche when making love, I would not have been able to lie like that. She was after a casual fling... but didn't tell me that.

Add to the list of blokes who have taken the 'don't even THINK about talking to women unless you have specific business to discuss' rule literally (re harassment) - but also long for a close intimate

relationship with an attractive, kind, Asperger-friendly lady.

Over stuff like sexual practice thought about, I feel that the kind of activity I dream about sometimes involves being led or ministrated to, in order to learn, overlay the negative emotions, enabling me to advance down this road. Basically, as a male Aspie, being more passive. It would be interesting to see a survey conducted on what types of practices are preferred or dreamed about.

That's it for now.

Alex Cockell

Reply from the Editor

Thank you for your contribution Alex. It is good to see that the survey has created so much discussion. Please keep your comments coming in.

Please send all letters to: *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.
Fax 0171 833 9666

Useful Website addresses

Websites for people with an autistic spectrum disorder

ANI (Autism Network International)

<http://www.students.uiuc.edu/~bordner/ani.html>

ANI, an autistic-run self-help and advocacy organisation for autistic people.

Websites containing personal experiences

The AutiRing Homepage

<http://www.dryad.clara.net/autring.html>

Autiring is a collection of homepages from people who have personal experience of autism.

(OASIS) Online Asperger Syndrome Information and Support

<http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/>

The site offers an expansive collection of personal experiences from individuals on

Websites only open to people on the autistic spectrum

Independent Living Forums (INLV)

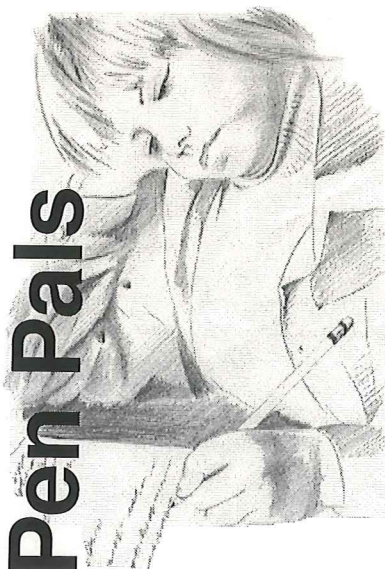
<http://www.inlv.demon.nl/>

A series of support lists/forums for individuals on the autistic spectrum.

#Asperger

<http://www.nox.com/asp/asp.htm>

This channel is only open to those individuals who are on the autistic spectrum. A safe place to



How to reply to a Pen Pal

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

If you would like to reply to any of the letters or requests for contacts then please send your letter to: **Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.**

We will pass your letters on to the appropriate person. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.

Desmond Meldrum, New Barnet, Hertfordshire

Some of you may remember me from previous issues. For those who don't, I am a fifty year old male who was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome two years ago. At the moment I am unemployed but divide my time between helping my parents with odd jobs and doing two days a week voluntary work for Autism London, a charity offering support to all those on the autistic continuum who live in the London area. I also attend a speech and drama group once a week run for adults with the condition and have recently completed a correspondence course in Interpersonal Skills for Volunteers. In addition to this I have written two short books about my early life and some tips on how to cope with the condition.

My hobbies are reading, listening to rock music, organising car rallies for a local motor club and model railways. I have lived in my own maisonette for the last fifteen years and cope very well with it. I would be pleased to hear from anyone else who has the condition particularly in the London area.

James Lally, Solihull, West Midlands

My name is James Lally. I am 27 years of age and looking for male and female pen friends. Please write to me stating sex, age and location.

Jamie Jardine, Preston, Lancashire

My name is Jamie Jardine and I am 21 years old. I come from Preston, Lancashire and I was diagnosed as having Asperger syndrome when I was 17 years old. I, like most people with Asperger syndrome, have had difficulties at mainstream school. I work full-time for a local company who treat me as part of the team and have a great understanding of me. I like football and I'm a big fan of West Ham United, Celtic and Bolton Wanderers. I have a large collection of football shirts (around 250 to date) and I love travelling particularly on trains as well as the London Underground. I also like going out and socialising at a local club. I also do a lot of writing on my own word processor when I'm not out socialising.

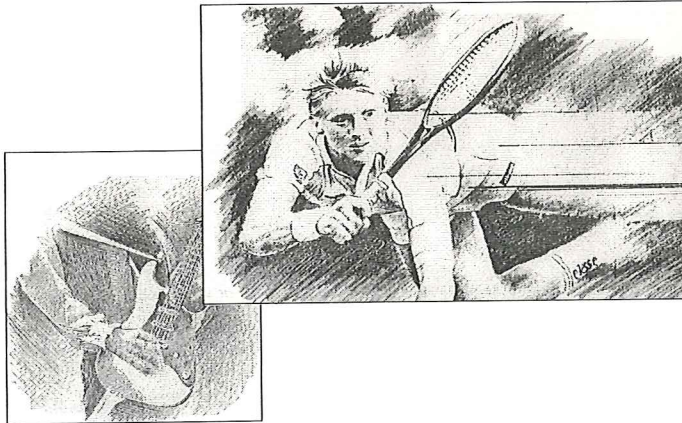
I am looking to hear from either males or females of all ages. If you want a new pen pal just get a pen and paper out and I hope to hear from you soon.

Estelle Jones, Pilning, Nr Bristol

My name is Estelle Jones and I am 21 years old. I like the Spice Girls and Kylie Minogue. I would like to have a pen pal because I want to have more friends. I like going to bars and dancing. I come from Cardiff but I'm living in Bristol now. I like horse riding and swimming.



Illustrations by George Cox



Illustrations by George Cox

Part three of the Short Story by Thomas Simmons

It had been a long and tiring journey. Ironfist and Hyron found it relatively easy to make their way through the dark forest, slashing and cutting their way through the dense undergrowth, but Xargoth was rapidly running out of strength. This was partly because he was old wizard, and didn't have much energy on a good day. But it was mainly because of the incident in the mountain...

They would have all died within minutes, if not seconds, had Xargoth not cast a counter-spell. It was easy. Almost too easy. It was obviously a trap.

Xargoth had just finished pronouncing the final syllable when Hyron noticed a green glow from the darkness of the tunnel. It grew gradually larger and larger, as a huge ball of ethereal green lightning hurtled toward them. Hyron jumped out of the way, but the wizard was still concentrating on the spell, and did not notice what was happening.

Thinking quickly, Ironfist threw himself at Xargoth, knocking the old wizard to the ground, a fraction before the lightning ball flew overhead, hitting a nearby wall and exploding harmlessly.

Pausing only to get their breaths back, they hurried out of the mountain.

After what seemed like hours, they found a clearing in the forest. They had not seen the sky since they entered the forest, and they were not surprised to find it was night.

As the group entered the clearing, they saw a large stone doorway in the centre. They had no idea why it was there; it did not seem to go anywhere. "We can investigate it in the morning", said Hyron. "But right now let's just get some sleep". The others agreed with this, and Ironfist went to start a fire near the edge of the clearing.

They all huddled around the fire, and the darkness of the night seemed to engulf them. "One of us should stay awake", Ironfist suggested. "The last thing we want is to be attacked while we're sleeping. I'll watch for the first few hours, then Hyron can take over". He turned to Xargoth. "I think you could do with a s much sleep as you can get", he said to the wizard, "After what happened in the tunnel".

Xargoth nodded, "I don't have much energy left", he agreed. "A night's rest would probably...". He broke of in mid-sentence. He could feel something watching. He slowly scanned the trees and shrubs, and suddenly stopped. It was there. Something was... but it was gone now. Very strange.

Not worth worrying about, he thought, and lay down on the cold grass, putting his staff and spell book beside him. The last thing he saw before sleep claimed him was Ironfist, leaning on his sword. looking out into the darkness, and the stone portal in the centre of the clearing....

Note from the Editor

Have you written anymore of the story, Thomas. We would love to find out what happens next.

Growing up with Asperger syndrome *by Desmond Meldrum*

This is a series of excerpts from an autobiography I have written entitled Growing up with Asperger Syndrome dealing with employment.

In the spring of 1966 I took up a clerical post in the Home Office after my parents contacted several government departments to see what the prospects for a career were. All might have been well, was it not for one vital point being overlooked in the process; I only had four O'level passes, which meant that I was on a three month probationary period before establishment. One needed five passes for immediate establishment.

When I started work I found it all a bit of an adventure. I was now an adult commuting into town and I felt very pleased with myself. I was in a small office with two elderly ladies and for the first few weeks all seemed to go well. The warning signs came when I was called into the divisional manager's office and told that I would be transferred to another department as it was felt that the job I was doing carried a lot of pressure. I could not understand why he was saying this as I felt that the job I was doing was fairly easy, although I did panic on one or two occasions. I was transferred to a different department and found myself in a very small office at the top of the building. Here I was to be trained for my new job by a rather cantankerous spinster who seemed to be at odds with the world and certainly did not like young people. I was not able to grasp the fundamentals of the work I would eventually be doing. Again, at the time it did not occur to me that there would be any problem and when I was told that my performance was unsatisfactory I was very upset indeed. Next followed various consultations between the management and my parents, which resulted in my eventual demotion to

a third department, working at a lower grade post.

Although the work I was doing was well within my capabilities, I felt a little demoralised at the idea of being downgraded. This was compounded by the fact that I was sitting opposite a rather pathetic little man who did nothing but complain about his lot in life. In retrospect, the most sensible thing would have been to make the best of things and try for a fifth O'level. I did in fact sit the examination at the beginning of 1967, but failed. Perhaps I should have had another try.

It would seem that my early experiences of the world of employment were not too successful. I did not know what was expected of me and just did what I was told. I was not able to ask questions or for any kind of help. At first I made a big effort to make friends with my colleagues, but when things started to go wrong I again retreated within myself. I found myself with people I had little in common with and found it difficult to know how I should approach them.

Both my parents and myself decided that the best thing would be to have a fresh start and I began to look for work in the private sector. I was eventually offered a post in a local marine insurance office.

My new job was certainly an improvement on the previous one. All my colleagues were young and cheerful and I felt that perhaps I could settle down there. Again, all seemed to go well at first, but it was not long before I got into difficulty with the work and in the spring of 1968 I was given an easier job to do. This consisted mostly of postal work and filing. However, I was becoming increasingly frustrated with my inability to do these jobs and began to think that there must be something more in life. My original job in this company was

concerned with collecting the premiums from various shipping companies. I had no knowledge of the commercial world and was unable to develop any understanding of the work. I stayed there until the spring of 1969, when I was called into the manager's office and was told that I no longer had a job. The reason I was given was that I did not fit in. He claimed that the management had been considering this action for the last year, but as far as I was concerned I had been given no warning. However, it did appear that the company was in financial difficulties and this could have been a form of redundancy.

A few months before this happened, my mother saw an advert in a newspaper for a six week computer course and suggested that I should give it a try. As I was now unemployed, I felt that there was little to lose, so I did. This was a small outfit in the west end of London run by Canadians who believed they could teach people how to programme a computer in six weeks. I completed the course and then discovered it was bogus. A complete waste of time and money. I then found employment in a large publishing company as a subscriptions clerk. That lasted seven weeks. I was now at my wits end.

I set about looking for another job yet again. I spent the next few days pounding the streets, desperately trying to find some sort of job or even some sort of assistance from the helplines that were available at the time. After a week of this, I came home and slumped in a chair in my bedroom. This brought matters to a head and my father, realising that there was something seriously wrong, arranged for me to see a psychiatrist again. He, in turn, recommended that I should be admitted to a short term psychiatric hospital.

I stayed in this hospital for six months until my discharge, after which I attended a government industrial rehabilitation unit for a period of six weeks.

After the rehabilitation course, I found a badly paid clerical post in a small company run by some dubious characters who I was totally unable to communicate with. This was probably the worst job I ever had, as all I was doing was writing out labels for parcels while being verbally abused by the assistant manager. I stayed there for seven months before deciding that it was time to move on and have another try for a proper career. I was still on heavy medication and was probably not yet ready. I saw an advert asking for recruits for the Department of the Environment and put in an application. To my great surprise I was accepted and in early 1971 I joined the department as a clerical officer. This proved to be a big mistake, as I encountered the same difficulties as I had during my time at the Home Office. This was made worse by the fact that I was on medication and could not concentrate on the job and satisfy my superiors. I was demoted again and this time I was in an office with some very unpleasant characters, including a supervisor who was nothing short of a small minded bully. I stayed there a year before being asked to leave.

When I left the DOE in late 1972, I spent the next few months doing temporary jobs. One of these was as a postal clerk for a publishing company. I quite enjoyed this job, because of the laid back atmosphere. I was with a crowd of young people and my job was to sort out the post and distribute it to various departments. Eventually, after making enquiries, I realised that I had no future there, so on a day off I walked into an agency and returned home later, having been offered a job in a cement company as an accounts clerk.

This was a very large company,

originally based in the centre of London, and I was working in a large open plan office. I was also fortunate in the fact that I had a sympathetic colleague who was willing to help and support me. The work itself was not too difficult and very soon I settled down there, the only problem being that the company moved to South London soon after I joined. This involved a lengthy train journey and I was faced with the decision as to whether I should live in the new location or change my job. I compromised by staying where I was and commuting, as it took only an hour. I stayed with this company for a longer period than at any other occupation. It was a time of fairly full employment when there were plenty of jobs for clerks. It was also a large company and, for a time, very stable.

Soon after this, rumours started circulating concerning changes which would come about in the near future. These came to fruition in February 1984, when the department I was working for moved the office to Gravesend. The company was getting into financial difficulties and this move was an easy way of reducing the workforce. I was then faced with the choice of either moving there myself or taking voluntary redundancy along with several of my colleagues. As all my social ties were in North London and the threat of compulsory redundancy loomed at a later date, I opted for the latter. I applied for several jobs and was fortunate in obtaining a position working for my local authority. Despite this, I was very sorry to be leaving the company, because it was the most successful job I have ever had. As I have mentioned previously, I was working under someone who seemed to understand my problem and would back me up if there were any problems.

I found myself in the position of having to get used to another job when I thought I was set for life in my previous job. This job turned

out to be slightly different from my previous job in that it paid less and was at a lower grade. The one advantage of it was that it was local and I could save money on train fares. Other than that, I found the system frustrating at times and I was missing my helpful colleague at the cement company. I also found that I had little in common with some of the other people in the office, although after a few initial difficulties I coped with the work reasonably well. It was for this reason that I kept to myself when I was in the office. I found general office chatter very irritating, although, to a certain extent, I used to do the same at my previous office. My boss at the time, although he was a very fair person, commented several times that he was not able to deal with my problems as he did not know where they were.

In the spring of 1988, I was given a promotion which boosted my confidence somewhat. Unfortunately, this new job involved a fair amount of telephone work with sometimes irate customers, which became fairly stressful.

When I joined the local authority, I thought perhaps I had a job for life. This was not to be. With the recession and government cutbacks, I was selected for redundancy, which took effect from April 1993. Soon after this I went to a careers exhibition and saw a stand set up by The National Autistic Society. Out of curiosity I took one of their leaflets. I spoke to my father about this and he seemed to feel that this was my problem. We were then put in touch with the North East London Autistic Society (now Autism London) and this led to the discovery that I may have Asperger Syndrome.

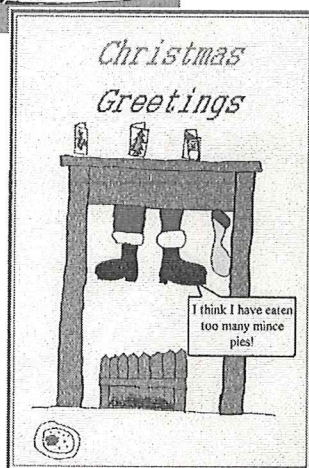
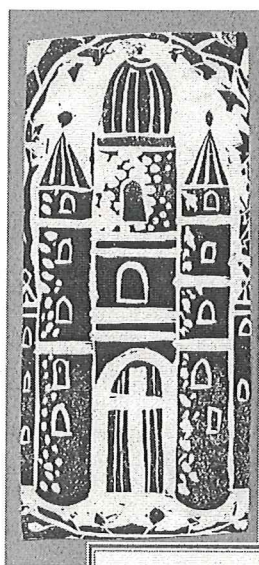
I have been officially unemployed since then, although I still do voluntary work at Autism London. I would be very pleased to hear from any others about their experiences in employment.



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Registered in England No. 1205298
Registered Office: 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Registered as a Charity No. 269425

Christmas Card designs



Thank you to both Simon Barber (top) and Michael Salter (bottom) for their Christmas Card designs.



Untitled

When the spirits that be
Sat down to see
What sort of pieces they would take
And which pattern of life to make

They got a bit befuddled
Their putting together was muddled
And the part of me that acts as filter
Is well and truly out of kilter.

It's not so much that I don't seem
Outwardly unusual, without physical form -
It's more that the space I've been
Is well outside the norm.

My pain is that in adversity
In my life of such diversity
I cannot hold the whole together
And frequent storms I cannot weather

It's not just the fear of blips
Or the finger pressed to lips
To say go softly, quietly, slowly
To celebrate a place that is holy,

It's really that my mind is agile
But my wider being is so fragile
To encompass all that belongs to be
And all that perception can see.

I have a head, two hands and feet,
I stand up, I take a seat
But somewhere inside where all paths cross
I suffered a profound life marking loss

Because I have a part of me
That is in a space all of its own
And as much as I can clearly see
The external world, I remain alone.

Anne Wheeler

What am I?

My soul is like a diamond,
Containing leaping flames;
My soul is like a diamond,
Whose being dwarfs all else.

This heart's a raging torrent,
Confined within a gorge,
Carrying all before it -
At the rare times when it rains.

And what can make it
stronger?
A taut, persuasive force?
A fine, elusive spirit
That never was defined;

The mountain soul is my key
To unlock the hidden gold,
By climbing further up the
glen
That man has ever climbed
before,

To release the joy inside me:
On crag, or hill, or moor -
the soft, far, mountain vision
Moves shimmering through
my door.

Steve van Dulken