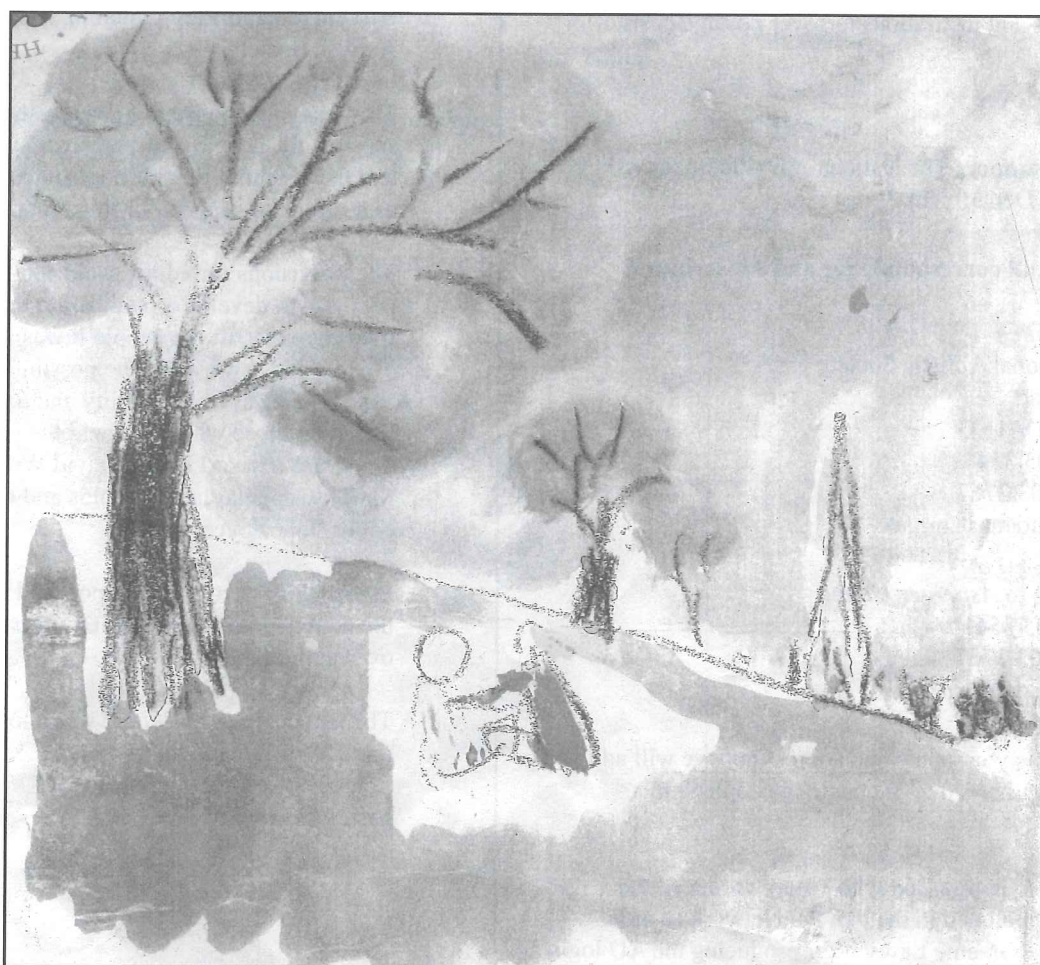


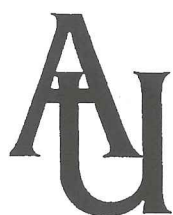
Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

Asperger united

Edition 35 July 2003



Tim Loder





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

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

Editor John Joyce

Additional support The National Autistic Society s Publications Department

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:

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Subscribing to *Asperger United*

Tel: 020 7903 3541
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All we need is your name and address and we will add you to the mailing list —free of charge to people with a diagnosis!

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

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

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 and the current editor, John Joyce.

Pamela Yates provided support and advice to the editors until the publication was handed over to the NAS 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.

Welcome to the new edition of your newsletter.

Hope you are looking forward to the Summer and perhaps a holiday.

May I thank you all for your continued support of your newsletter and ask you all to do so for as long as I remain editor.

I apologise for the non-appearance of a report on Melbourne which has now been remedied (thank you Gordon Ball for reminding me).

I have recently visited many parts of the country watching semi-professional football in such outposts as Oadby (Leicester) Tamworth, Sudbury (Suffolk), Havant and Yeovil where I saw the local club crowned Champions of the Conference.

Before I go I must just mention that one of our readers telephoned us recently to let us know of a brand of

foam earplugs (Boots - serial no. 4367235) that have been of great benefit to him. He says that these particular earplugs can be worn all day and act as a filter to soften everyday noise that people with AS can sometimes be extremely sensitive to. He wanted us to let other readers know - so thank you, Mr St John, for that.

I hope to speak at the European Autism Congress in Lisboa later this year but more on that next issue.

Please keep those contributions coming in - art, poetry, short stories, personal experiences, letters - anything that you think may be of interest to our readers.

Best wishes

Your editor

John Joyce



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MELBOURNE NOVEMBER 2002

The week of 10-14 November 2002 was a personal milestone, being the first time I had visited Australia and my debut at public speaking. The first World Autism Congress was held in Melbourne's Convention Centre and was opened by the Governor of the State of Victoria, John Landy, who, in the 50s, was a great rival of Roger Bannister and first Australian track athlete to make a name for himself.

After the plenary sessions which opened each day of the congress, various workshops were held. The very first plenary session gave a questionable assessment of the cause of autism, this being reflected in the size of the head. What the compere could not say on the day can be said now. The good doctor's brain must be added!

Thursday was the day chosen for my presentation. Like the weakest batsmen, I was last man in and attempted to give my vision of Social Skills. I saw it as a way of helping Asperger people communicate with the rest of the world. I gave a little account of my life and my talk was well received. Though I had prepared the gist of a talk to be included in the conference programme, I deviated considerably. I followed our former London member Richard Exley and the Australian Harold Stone whose contribution would have done justice to Radio Five's rant line.

During the week we had an official dinner and dance and a lunch in which we were given a talk by former Australian track athlete, Ron Clarke, who was making appeal to the members of the Congress to help send a young person with autism to the International Disabled Games in Dublin. Ron Clarke promised a dollar of his own for each dollar collected. Though this was an

International Congress, most of those present were Australian.

AUSTRALIA OUTSIDE MELBOURNE

Following the Congress, I moved on to Sydney where a few people attending the Conference spent some time visiting Jervis Bay and Featherdale Wildlife Park and taking the Harbour cruise. I remained in Sydney a couple of days after the others left.

I have a cousin who lives on the north side of the harbour. She and most of her family are involved in medicine and nursing. I spent an evening with Mary and her husband, a dentist. They have seven children between 27 and 40; none of them married.

After a week in Sydney I went to Perth, where I also have cousins resident. They provided me with transport. My first full day in Perth started in St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, where I attended a Funeral Mass for Robert Healy, Assistant Bishop, who had died during the previous week. Unlike most funerals in UK this took place on a Saturday.

I also have an octogenarian aunt, younger sister of my father, who has been a nun in Perth for 55 years. I was taken to visit her by my cousins, then made a personal visit.

Another person I met is an Internet correspondent of mine, a Londoner living in Perth for 30 years. I may well visit OZ again.

John Joyce

MALE? AGED BETWEEN 11 AND 16? WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)? IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOL? BEING BULLIED? WANT HELP?

The Pervasive Developmental Disorders Team at the Maudsley Hospital is planning to set up a study into the effectiveness of an anti-bullying programme to help boys with ASD acquire strategies to reduce any bullying they may experience at school. For more information contact:

Jenny Ronayne
Michael Rutter Centre for Children and Young People
The Maudsley Hospital
DeCrespigny Park
Denmark Hill
London SE5 8AZ

Tel: 020 7919 2535 / Fax: 020 7740 5011
jenny.ronayne@slam-tr.nhs.uk

WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP WITH RESEARCH AT GOLDSMITH COLLEGE?

Dr Lorna Goddard and Ms Trishna Patel are researching memory from past experiences in adults (aged 18-35) with Asperger syndrome. You will be asked to recall memories and to imagine what you would do in various problematic situations. The interview lasts approximately one hour and a fee of £10 (+ travel expenses) is paid for participation. Alternatively, the research assistant can come to you and the interview can take place in your own home.

If you are interested in taking part or would like to know more please contact: -
Trishna on 020 7919 7388/7175 or email
pss01tp@gold.ac.uk

You're nicked!. A review of Crocks and Robbers broadcast by Channel Four 16/12/02, 9pm

As you know, I've got a disability. Don't cry for me, and don't cry for the lags in Channel 4's *Crocks and Robbers*. We were shown a series of criminals with disabilities with the intention of challenging stereotypes of them as victims of crime.

It did, as it showed people making a living in the only way they could: drug dealing, theft, violence and even rehabilitation in some cases. We were shown how an offender takes advantage of both his disability and the kindness of the public. We saw one offender show us how they'd got into the producer's car with no legs, demonstrating his agility. This seeming braggadocio was undercut with the fact he lost his legs when he was nine climbing onto a train, rather than the crime itself and the fact he was addicted to drugs.

Thus the documentary challenges stereotypes in one respect, yet perpetuated the myth of otherness that links disfigurement with criminality. We see it in the Joker, King Richard III, Hitler (he of only one knacker) and any other figure you can imagine. Hence I think it shows and capitalises on the hypocrisy of our relationship with people with disabilities. We pity them, but when the stereotype is subverted by committing a crime, we think in terms of disgust and amorality.

It's as if we see the wheelchair then mark them as idiotic, criminal or whatever. The best example was a hard man who was bullied and lumped in with the fat and wheezy boys, never picked for sports. Until he got a hook on his false arm. He got involved in fights and this led to him having to clean the hook afterwards. I'm even wondering whether he was chosen as he's close to the stereotype I was talking about of a hard man like Richard Kiel's Jaws. Mind you, his hook's terrifying if you're on the receiving end. He was addicted to the violence. He said this was the only way he could get respect.

At an institutional level, this documentary shows that the prison service and the law make no provision for convicts with disabilities, using two stories of a convict's time in prison. One woman fraudulently claimed housing benefit, as she owned her home. Panged with guilt, she confessed and got a year in prison. The worst thing was not the sentence, but the abuse by the guards. At one point, she tells us that she fell down on the floor and wasn't discovered until 8am. She was told that the guards didn't care if she pissed herself but, worse still, was the fact that she needed to get down stairs but there were no lifts. She had to get down stairs three times a day to report to the guards.

From these stories, the documentary was telling about the flaws of equal opportunities and the prejudices of the state around disability.

This candid look at the outsider trying to survive by their wits followed one illegal door-to-door salesman committing crime to boost his insufficient allowance, but it could be seen as an underhand attempt at getting him incriminated in his work. Here, he uses his deformed arm to gain the sympathy of the customer, but I'm wondering if there's an argument that he's being used for entertainment value.

I'm not so sure if this is true, but I thought this documentary got its aims spot on, challenging the stereotypes of the disabled as the victim and showing them as survivors on one hand. On the other, it perpetuates the stereotype of the deformed as the villain. While this was its major flaw, it was inevitable that this debate would come up and the programme opened the debate up well.

I thought it was a good start, did you?

Chris Henniker

Bad Dream

A walk along an unlit path
Was clouding my objective
For every step incurred delay
From fears I half expected
Within the dark a scream I heard
It can't be human! But that's absurd
I start to run, I trip and fall
I've lost my grip my wherewithal.

Then up ahead a hole appears
Which should have been a warning
But I fell straight in up to my neck
And stayed there till the morning,
Through squinting eyes
I viewed the dawn
And pondered on its meaning,
Then suddenly it becomes quite clear
I'm home in bed, just dreaming

Tom



letters to the editor

Hi, I have Asperger syndrome and I receive *Asperger United*.

About the pen friends part - with some of them it doesn't say where they live or how old they are. In the most recent issue, 34, I would like to know where the 16-year-old boy John lives! And how old is Susannah? If I knew about this information then I'd be more likely to contact these people, say if I knew one lived near me or if they were the same age. I think it is important that you put this information in *Asperger United*. Otherwise, you do a great job.

Peter Myers artwork, by the way, is really great, very detailed and interesting. Does he have a website with all these pictures in colour?

Marriane

I am sorry Marianne but this information is not available to me. Perhaps these people will inform the NAS when they see your request.
John (editor)

Dear John

I was reading the letter by D. Forster in Issue 34 of *AU* and noticed that they mentioned Bach's Rescue Remedy. Could you provide any information as to what this is and where I may be able to get it as the noise issue is a problem for me as well.

Craig Sellwood

Bach's Rescue Remedy is a Healing Herb that some people have found useful in helping to relieve stress and anxiety. It's widely available from pharmacies and health stores but please make sure that you ask for further advice before using.

Please note that Asperger United and the NAS is not in a position to recommend the use of Bach's Rescue Remedy or other remedies.

Dear Editor

My name is James, my hobbies are collecting things on music CDs, DVDs, mugs, keyrings and doing quiz programmes. I have known that I have Asperger syndrome since I was 30 years old. I am now 41 years old and life seems a bit better than before.

I received the *Asperger United* editions that you sent me last month (32 & 33). I've read them now and I find it interesting to read about people like myself. Have you got any back copies please that I can have as in lots of ways these are the folk who really understand me?

By the way, your pen pal piece might help me as I would be interested to know any nice young ladies with the same interests as me for a decent friendship or relationship as that is what I have wanted for years.

I sort of live on my own but it can get a bit much at times as neighbours and other folk don't understand you so much, so I'm looking for sheltered accommodation with the help of my social worker. I also need to start getting out and socialising more, like I used to a few years back.

If you know anyone I can write to this would be nice as letter writing is another one of my interests.

I go to a day course once a week but I am thinking of doing something different, as I'm interested in conservation. I got interested through someone I met recently when I was with a friend, who also has learning difficulties.

Thank you

James

Dear James

Thank you for your letter.

Unfortunately we no longer have any early back issues of AU left, but why don't you send your details into AU for the pen-pals page or, if anyone out there wants to write to James, then please do so via AU.



How to reply to Pen Pals

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

Hello.

I thought that some of your members in the Bedfordshire area may be interested in the idea of an

Asperger adult social group. I was diagnosed with AS two years ago, and want to set up some sort of social group for people with AS - an informal group that meets up on a certain time and gets involved in social activities or even just coming together for a chat etc.

As you probably know, services for people with Aspergers and related conditions aren't that great in Beds, and I go to an adult social group run by the NAS - but it's in London (which is part of the problem).

If you know of any adults with AS / HFA that are interested, then I can be contacted via *Asperger United*.

Best Wishes

Neil Burrows

My name is Richard Wiles. I am 26 years old and have only recently been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome.

I am looking for a pen pal in the Hampshire area (New Forest). I have recently moved from Zimbabwe and am looking to make contact with other people who have the condition. My hobbies are computing, wildlife, walking and reading novels.

I m Stephen, I m 38 and currently in prison. I m into music (writing my own). I m looking especially for a female penpal. I was living in London but I m hoping to move to Kent. I have Asperger syndrome.

My name is Antony. I m 33 with AS. I am interested in swimming and tennis. I enjoy watching football and listening to pop music. I m looking for a pen pal with similar interests in sport and popular culture. I live in Leeds.

I m 33, married and haven t worked for far too long. I am obsessed with astronautics, books and Elvis. But I know not to talk too much to my wife about it as I like to listen to her and I talk too much. I want to be fair as in the past I wasn t but I didn t realise that others don t get as excited as me about these things that I like. When I listen to others I also get wiser and I enjoy it.

Nicholas



Schoolwork and other things

Following on from part one, published in the last issue of AU, Robert Hains focuses on his school years.

New school (boarding) - eight years old.

After two and a half weeks I seemed to have settled, after a fashion, and we reached the first exit, which at that time involved going home on Sunday after breakfast and morning assembly, and coming back in the evening, so we were only home for a few hours. I remember looking out of the window into the front drive and seeing my mother waiting for me in the car with one of my sisters. We made eye contact and smiled. That day people might have thought I'd reached some kind of stability in this boarding situation — perhaps I even thought so myself, but it wasn't real, as three days later my seemingly out of proportion reaction to something trivial seems to indicate.

I was feeling relatively content and as we went to a gym lesson, outdoors, which involved going down an outside staircase, I saw another boy in front of me jump straight down to the lawn below, and I copied him. Landing unhurt on the lawn I thought it was fun so continued running up the stairs to jump down again. Unfortunately the Headmaster's wife observed me from a window.

This school had houses with positive and negative house points for each boy. There were charts on the wall, on which staff could initial plus and minus boxes by each boy's name as and when they awarded the pluses and minuses. It didn't really mean a thing but seemed to exert some power over young boys. She opened the window and told me she was giving me two minuses (some staff used to say a double minus).

I don't think this made much sense — if she was worried about me hurting myself why didn't she say so and express this concern appropriately — applying a pathetic in-house form of punishment was meaningless and stupid. Also the message seemed to be that enjoying myself was wrong — the Headmaster had wanted me to show a bit of free spirit, but now that I did I was obviously wrong. The upshot of all this was that I started crying and blabbing and wouldn't be consoled — I don't really know why exactly. I made up a song about it about six months later after we'd got a cassette recorder for Xmas, which I've still got recorded — *Robert's lament* my parents called it. By the next time I got a minus a few weeks later I'd given up crying about it.

As autumn moved towards winter and we had colder and wetter weather, we were more frequently made to wear our navy macs over our uniforms for going home and to the village church. I always hated this because I felt ridiculous, with the mac fully covering my little grey shorts and a bit of flesh showing between the bottom of the mac and the top of my long grey socks

held up with garters — to this day, since I've had more free choice about what I wear, I will never wear a coat of longer than a long jacket length done up, because of what people imposed on me as a little boy.

At this time I started writing dramatic stories in which people died. I used to always be a little fascinated by fire practice and fire alarms, when we all had to assemble in the science block and answer our names with Yes sir! (Would it have been quicker just to answer yes so they could start searching for missing boys sooner?)

One time when the fire alarm was activated by burning toast or some such thing two boys couldn't be found for a while — I thought this rather exciting, and wrote a story about a fire in a zoo. The teacher seemed perplexed by me not writing a description of animals stampeding in a frenzied panic or anything like that. My story consisted principally of the role call of names, and some not answering because they were dead.

I also had a fascination with stories of epic length, and started writing my own. In one of her reports my teacher wrote that I seemed to need to write long complicated stories that didn't make much sense to her, but I obviously enjoyed it. The Headmaster wrote that I had had a traumatic term but had survived to tell the tale, and thought that on the whole I had rather enjoyed it (what did he know?). He added that I had dropped several places in class and would have to make these up next term (was he really surprised that my work had deteriorated, what on earth did he expect?).

To set the picture slightly on this time, we weren't able to watch television, we in the bottom dormitory started going to bed at 6.45 p.m., had a bath two or three times a week, which water we shared not only with another boy in at the same time, but other boys before and after, and for the bottom two dormitories matron had a chart on the wall with all our names on it, with the days of the term heading the columns, so each box would be filled with a tick or a cross, according to whether each boy had been or not (I can't remember whether or not matron actually asked us Have you been? in precisely those words).

During Easter Term '73 we did an activity with some chemical that enabled us to copy newspaper print onto another sheet of paper (presumably things would come out the wrong way round, unless it was a two part transfer). We were supposed to write about it in a half hour prep, but I was so fascinated by it, that I spent most of the half hour in contemplation of my reproduced print and only wrote about one line. The upshot of this was

having for the rest of that term to show my prep to the duty teacher at the end. This was quite humiliating especially when I had to interrupt the teacher rehearsing the play with about half the school present. It never seemed to occur to anyone that my lack of writing was because I was so interested in the subject — they not only didn't see the value of beholding something and thinking about it, but also probably never imagined me capable of it.

It was at about this time I remember becoming very interested in lists and ordered information. We used to have various lists of boys names in the school — lists of boys in each dormitory, lists of boys in each class, the order reflecting positions at the end of last term, and lists of boys names in each house for the pluses and minuses (these were notional houses, not physical houses). I used to want to recite lists of boys order in class to my family, but they weren't interested.

It was in summer holiday '73 that I became interested in the singles chart. No. 1 was *I'm the leader of the gang* by Gary Glitter, and in the latter half of August it started falling, to 3, then 6, then 17. Other songs of the same time included *48 Crash* by Suzi Quatro which I think got up to number 3 and fell to 7, then 14, *All right, all right, all right* by Mungo Jerry which had already fallen from 3 to 6 in Gary Glitter's last week at 1, and then fell to 10, 26 then 28, *Ying Tong Song* by the Goons, which got up to number 9, then fell to 15, then to 21, and then out of the top 30 (in fact to 33 as I found out some years later).

In autumn term '73 I finally moved up after seven terms in the same class, to a lady class teacher who was somewhat sterner and stricter in manner. During this term we were all encouraged to make the transition from writing in pencil to pen. The teacher didn't like my way of writing 8s, which was made of two circles one on top of the other. She also once wrote under my work 'If you think I am marking such untidy work you are mistaken - 0'.

I have been picked up for my handwriting throughout my life. Now I know that it is a slight lack of natural co-ordination compared with the majority of others. In order for me to write neatly I have to work slowly — this got me into trouble on one occasion a little later on.

I remember one week before half-term (which would only last four days!) the Headmaster heard us saying in the dormitory that we were looking forward to it. He said 'Why are you wishing your lives away? — You'll never again be the age you are now!'

The fact is that we should enjoy every moment that we have young and healthy bodies, but obviously some of us felt to varying degrees that the time didn't belong to us — wasn't ours to enjoy as we wanted — it belonged to bothersome adults, and even some other children, who said we shouldn't be doing what we were doing, but be doing something else, that we shouldn't be interested in what we were interested in, but interested in something else, and that we shouldn't be thinking about what we were thinking about, but about something else, that we shouldn't have the opinions we had, but some other opinions.

Maybe the low percentage of time that we were based at our parents' homes was the only time we felt free to be ourselves, to do whatever we most wanted to do, and not to have to do things we didn't want to. If I could be back in this time in October 1973 now, I would reply to the Headmaster 'Yes, you are right, I should appreciate this moment, and enjoy it to the full, but I can't do that here, and I don't want to spend it with you, under your jurisdiction!'

The class teacher was ill for the last three and half weeks of this Christmas term and for Easter term 1974 I was to be moved up again. For Christmas 1973 Slade's famous song was no.1, and one of my Christmas presents was *I love, you love, me love* by Gary Glitter, by now displaced from 1 to 2. About this time I started making up my own fictional top 30s from all the 7 inch 45s we had at home, and playing through them — it seemed that movement up and then down was more fascinating than the music itself.

It was at this time when I was about nine and a half that, in some vague sense that is hard to define, my mind suddenly became much sharper, but most easily exemplified in my sudden awareness of date, time, chronology, and of events passing further and further into the past, often happy moments, and I felt some indefinable regret at their sinking into history. So, in many ways not perceived or understood by adults around me, my mind was very busy.

We started the new term on Thursday 17th January, starting actual classes on the Friday. This term I started Latin. School didn't go well, with my getting four Ds in the first fortnightly ratings and being called to the Headmaster's office.

As far as most of my teachers were concerned, I wasn't working at this time — however in truth my mind was working very hard in thinking about the changing around me, and making my own conclusions.

Continued on following page

More writing/Letters

Continued from previous page

world around me, and making my own conclusions.

On Friday 22nd a truly ludicrous and unfair event took place. At the lunch table three boys variously kicked, tickled and restrained me, and I screamed out. When teachers asked me what had happened I told them, and the end result was that the punishment of minuses and bar on talking at meals was applied to me along with them. I asked the teacher why and he answered 'Because you let out that yell - you should have controlled yourself.'

What the hell was I supposed to make of that? a world in which you get punished for being bullied. No wonder I had no concept that school was supposed to prepare me for adult life. This man was also very free in applying his hand across boys' heads, often for no apparent reason. He once made sarcastic comments to me implying that I was a lesser person for not wanting to play rugby - overall an arrogant, cruel, conceited man, yet capable of moments of great kindness.

Over the last five weeks of this term two significant events happened. Having started Latin very badly (with the same teacher who punished me for being bullied), something inexplicably clicked in my mind and I sailed ahead of the body of the class in this subject.

This pattern has been common throughout my life, in a system where there often isn't the patience for my steep

learning curve. I think that my mind likes to see ideas and concepts stand up to every possible logical angle of attack before I feel comfortable with them.

Teachers probably expect pupils to accept facts presented very much on the surface without probing the depths, and are exasperated by learners like myself.

The other event was increasing dissatisfaction with my schoolwork generally. The climax of this came on Tuesday 12th March 1974, when I was required to do a French exercise during the short break between lunch and games. At that moment I remembered the criticism I'd received for untidy handwriting and wrote one sentence out very slowly and neatly in the time. To my surprise no attention was paid to the neatness, just the fact that I had only done one sentence. In the evening I called to the room of the teacher who took us for French as ordered. He then ordered me to the Headmaster's office. After some spiel I can't remember and probably couldn't well understand, he gave me about six very hard whacks with a Gym shoe — I was still only nine years old — stupid, stupid man.

It obviously suited his purposes in the end of term report to focus solely on the negative, and seemingly be totally oblivious to my very positive Latin report.

Robert

Dear Editor

I was most interested in Peter Krebs' article in the April edition of *Asperger United* — it rang a lot of bells with me as I am also 65, studied physics at Oxford, have an informal assessment of borderline Aspergers, and was largely encouraged in investigating this by my husband who now makes allowances for my shortcomings! (After seeing TV programs, reading books, answering questionnaires and having interviews, we both agreed that Aspergers was the reason for them).

I was interested in Peter's comments about his reaction to uncertainty in Physics; I was also attracted to the subject because as well as it being interesting (and was well taught at my school), I appreciate its clear cut nature; I am pretty much out of touch with Physics now, but have taken up studying maths (Open University), and I'm often surprised by some aspects where one expects order but gets chaos!

With reference to the two particular points he makes —

lessons learnt — I agree that it is a great benefit to be able to accept and understand the limitations of Aspergers — such as no longer feeling bad about not relating easily to people.

The idea of an Asperger Anonymous, or self help group, sounds good: I don't know if I would join one myself, but I do find it interesting to read the magazine, as the articles and letters give such a good picture of the whole Asperger spectrum — and often strike a chord when you read of someone with similar thoughts and experiences.

So, thanks for the magazine!

All the best — S Meek

Thank you for your contribution. Another OU student - like your editor, though I am in the language school.
J. Joyce

Dear AU

For ten years this magazine has provided insight into the lives of people with AS. I think back to Anna Cohen who gave this magazine its name. I reflect that I was diagnosed, as Anna was, well over ten years ago and I look on how the magazine and ourselves have evolved.

I have a friend, Thomas, also with this condition. I find Thomas company animating. He's older and can reflect upon life twenty years ago. As a young man in his twenties Thomas lived in a world that knew little or nothing of his condition. I can imagine the irritated and perplexed states that he must have encountered whenever he fumbled, spoke too loudly (or not at all). Holidays too must have been a melancholy and introspective experience for him.

Thomas used to ride (and still does) alone on his bicycle along wild and desolate coastlines. I can see him — a forlorn figure standing at St. Ann's Head, under a leaden sky looking down at the fierce surf below wondering about the past and the future, disturbed and puzzled.

And for all the impairments of this condition, we (my friends and I) interact through this world through an inspired love of literature and art, and the deep power for reflective and philosophical discussion we share. We work daily to empower our lives with a great awareness of the expectations of the world around us. And each day and each week we feel dissolute and immolated by the world in which we live.

We each attend social groups where we mix with others with the condition. I go to one in Leicester. I appreciate the chance to meet other people with the problem but ultimately I come away bewildered and even more dislocated from society. I personally have found the experience of attending these social groups a most unsatisfying experience.

Name and address supplied.

*Thank you. Another
good report.
John (editor)*



*Photo of Thomas printed with
permission*

Asperger syndrome and war by David Shamash

I often wonder how I would have coped if I had lived through the war.

If I had been 18 in 1939 would someone like me still have had to join the army and if so, how would I have coped? I also wonder if I had been over five years old during the second world war, how would I have coped with evacuation. If there had been conscription when I was 18 in 1975, I do not think the army would have had me, although I was not diagnosed with Asperger syndrome because I had help. I had seen psychiatrists when I was a child.

I watched a play about a peculiar man in the army being shot for desertion during the First World War. He might have had Asperger syndrome because his commanding officer implied at the Court Marshall that he was too informal with his superior officers and he asked them the football score. It is typical of Asperger syndrome not knowing who one is not supposed to chat to.

In those days they were not aware of disability in general, they just caned boys who were peculiar and did not send them to psychiatrists. That meant that disabled young men who were not obviously disabled got into the army with the assumption that they could be made to fit in with firm handling, especially in the First World War. As a matter of fact, conscription did not stop until 1962 and they sent conscripts to Korea between 1950 and 1953, as there was a war.

I also wonder how children with Asperger syndrome coped when they were evacuated and sent to strangers during the Second World War.

Well, the only way to find out is for older people with Asperger syndrome to write to *Asperger United* if they were evacuated during the last war or if they had at any time done military service. Or you can write to me via the NAS.

Most research is for people under 50 but my questions mainly concern older people. I know that during the war they did not know about Asperger syndrome but there are some older people who were diagnosed later in life.

David Shamash

*David - thank you for your very interesting article.
Any response will be passed on to you.*

Editor

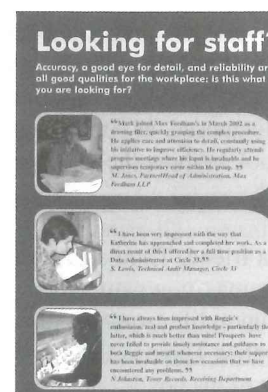
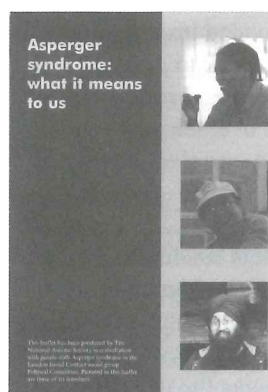
The National Autistic Society has produced two new leaflets on Asperger syndrome.

Asperger syndrome: what it means to us was written in consultation with the London based Contact social group, and includes general information on Asperger syndrome, case studies and a reading list.

The second leaflet, *Looking for staff*, is a list of tips for employers, put together by the NAS Prospects team.

Both are available free of charge from the Publications Department - 0207 903 3541.

Please note that at present, due to a limited number of leaflets printed, we are only able to send out two leaflets (one of each) per order.



Book News

A Real Person by Gunilla Gerland - reviewed by John Joyce

Gunilla comes from Sweden and was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome (A.S.) when she was 24 years old. Most of her personal recollections in this book cover her childhood and schooldays.

Her parents, because they did not know of A.S. at the time, found Gunilla difficult to manage and tried to push her to do what she could not handle, even to the extent of chewing food.

They could not get on with Gunilla or with one another and eventually divorced. However, Gunilla did have a rapport with her elder sister. Though she showed great progress in her education, especially in languages, she was bullied and misunderstood.

After leaving school she found that she could not fit in to the world of work though she could communicate with children and has worked on and off with children for most of her adult years.

In her late teens she drifted into drug addiction and went to live in Barcelona whilst learning Spanish. On her return to Sweden she met Christopher Gillberg, who diagnosed her. She had received a diagnosis of High Functioning Autism (H.F.A.) from another psychiatrist before Professor Gillberg changed it to A.S. Gunilla now lives in Stockholm.

This is a good read about all of the problems engendered

by our condition and I thoroughly recommend it.

A Real Person, published by Souvenir Press is available from the NAS Publications department (NAS 254) price £12.99

Special offer to readers of *Asperger United*!

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

Just send your order, together with cheque or postal order made payable to the NAS, for £12.99, or your credit card details, to *Asperger United* — see page 2 for full contact details.

COMPETITION

We have one copy of Gunilla Gerland's book to give away - just answer the following question and send to *AU* by 31 August 2003

Gunilla Gerland is Swedish; Name the capital city of Sweden.

The person chosen at random with the correct answer will receive the prize - contact details for *AU* on page 2.



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