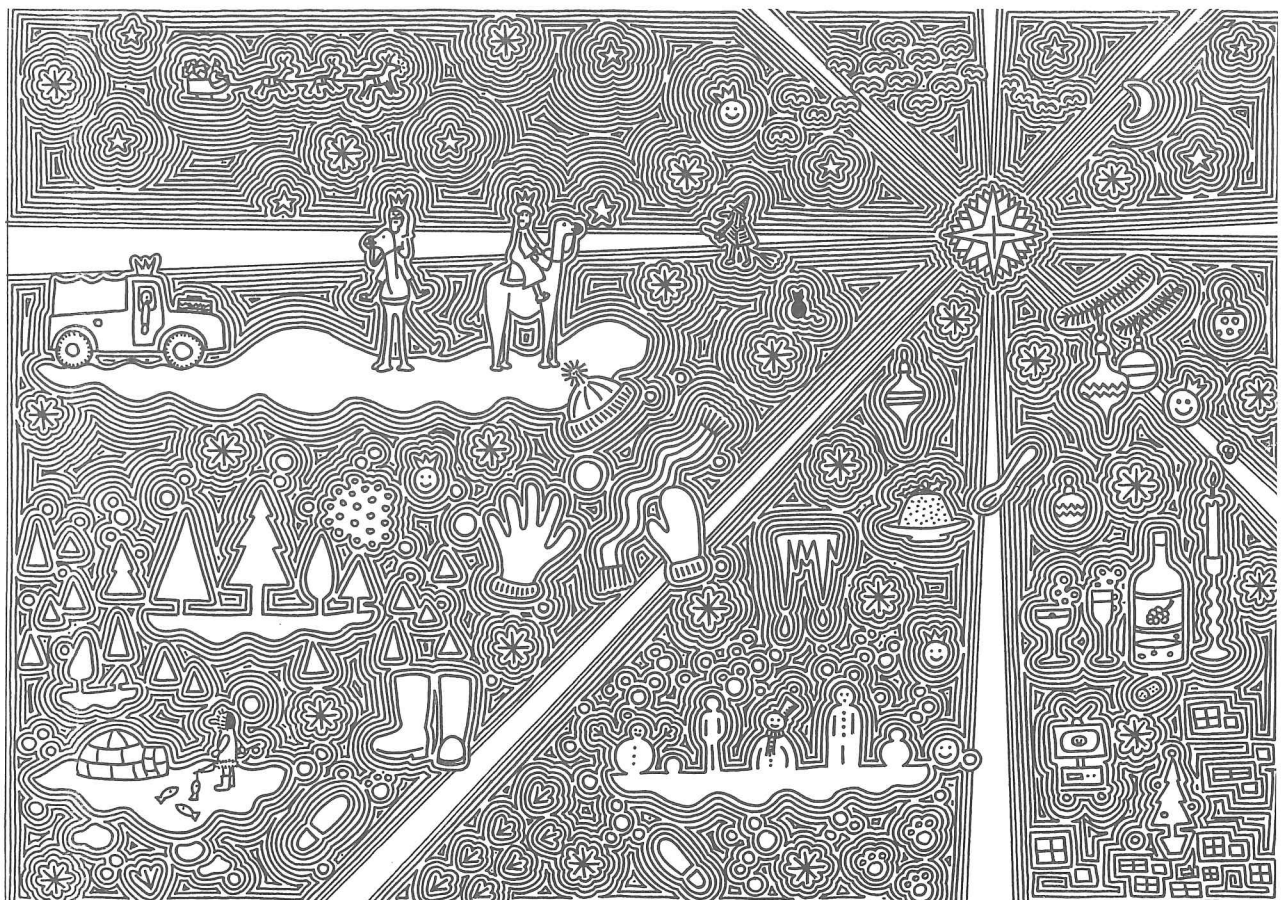


Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

Asperger *united*

Edition 37 January 2004



Peter Myers





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:

Asperger United
c/o The National Autistic Society
393 City Road
London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7903 3541
Fax: 020 7903 3767
Email: asp.utd@nas.org.uk

Subscribing to *Asperger United*

Tel: 020 7903 3541
Fax: 020 7903 3767
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 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.

Contributions for the next issue should reach us by
1 February 04

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 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.

Dear Readers

Welcome to a New Year and the latest edition of *Asperger United*. Thank you for your contributions, keep on sending them in. Hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and will be blessed with a Happy New Year.

I have recently attended a European autism congress in Lisbon, Portugal – a wonderful city ‘obrigado aos meus amigos portugueses’. A report on the congress will appear in a later edition.

Hope somebody has worked out my puzzle in the last edition about my mini holiday in July. Was anybody able to identify the country? By the way, I gave you a house name in the local language which means ‘house on top of the hill’, adequately describing the location of the property. Among others, Jack Charlton is known to have gone trout fishing in the lakes of this area, which now has very few residents under 30, and among the casualties of

the population drain has been the school which educated my father. The Archdiocese of Tuam sold the school building for redevelopment.

The London Social Skills Group had tea with an Asperger friendly Member of Parliament in December. A report of our activities will also appear in a later edition.

An Asperger conference is likely to be held in London in March. There will not be enough space for all who might like to attend. We will be limited to 80 people and an admission fee may be charged to help defray the cost of hiring the hall and professional speakers. No further details are available at present.

Yours faithfully
John Joyce – Editor



in this edition

Editorial	3
Feature: Exercise & AS	4
Feature: Nicholas' story	5
Letters to the editor	6
Pen pals	7
Poetry	8
Story: Vincents Death	9
Feature: Remploy & Christmas thoughts	10
Feature: Two film reviews	11
More pen pals	12
Artwork by Peter Myers	

Doing athletics with Asperger syndrome to get rid of clumsiness **

Just over three and a half years ago, when I was 26, I was diagnosed for a second time with Asperger syndrome (AS) with a more rigorous diagnosis, and had a missing circadian cycle diagnosed. The first diagnosis was in 1997; this led to me taking Melatonin each night. This has had an amazing effect: I have got a PhD place at Nottingham University in physical chemistry and protein biochemistry, but it has also helped my athletics enormously. One characteristic of AS is suffering poor arm and leg co-ordination, which makes one clumsy. I have got over this disadvantage considerably by incorporating into my athletics training, some simple and easy-to-do gym exercises which tighten one's joints up and help reduce poor co-ordination. Doing these has made me run 10 minutes 55 seconds for 2 miles (in training), 300m in 38 seconds (in training), 500m in 74 seconds (in training) and 800m in 2 minutes, 5 seconds (in racing), so far. I hope anyone with autism or Asperger syndrome find this useful. Please see the exercise description below.

Always do a five minute warm up jog first (you could gradually increase the pace)

These exercises include:

1 Pressups 3 x 10. Put hands close together, below your shoulders, and keep in elbows near you side. Keep back straight. After six weeks, raise feet 15 centimetres and repeat (1).

2 Knee raises. Lie on the ground, breath in, then out, and hold the lower abdomen in flat and tight, then raise one leg up slowly bending your knee, and keeping the shin horizontal and foot pointing up, raise your thigh until it is vertical, then lower it. Keep the other leg on the ground. Do this five times for each leg, and repeat three times. After six weeks, if you get stronger and it gets easier, increase to 10 per leg. Later hang from a bar by your hands, and raise knees together or alternatively to your chest. Keep the lower foot, always flat to the ground (1).

3 To work the adductor and abductor leg stabilization muscles. 3 x 10 Lying on one's side, raise top leg 10 times, then the bottom leg, keeping the whole leg straight. The top leg works the abductor and hip muscles outside the leg; the bottom raised works the inner leg adductor muscles. Doing these exercises makes the leg and hip muscles stronger, more stable and co-ordinated.

4 Stepups 3 x 10 on each leg; slowly, then faster.

Do all these slowly for six weeks, before doing each set of 10 at a faster pace. Remember to use full range of movement. After six weeks at the faster pace, perhaps go to weights, increasing by 10% on the body weight. Do not apply this increase to the knee raises. Stick at most to raising only the knees to the chest. After a minimum of six months, raise the whole leg out straight. If this is too difficult, stick to raising the knees only. This will prevent injuries. Whether doing the movements slowly, faster or fast with body weight or weights, a controlled, slightly strained technique must be used. Do not strain and buckle. If weights are too heavy, use lighter weights. After completing the exercises, which takes a maximum of 10 to 30 minutes, go for a gentle five minute jog. Do the exercises once or twice a week; missing the odd day does not matter. These exercises will help one sleep and feel stronger and healthier. They give you more feeling for your body's positions, and cost nothing, unless weights are used. The six week periods of work are a minimum.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dr K Aitken for advice, Mr J Lees (my coach), Dr J Bradshaw, Mr Bill Taylor and Mr R Hooton.

References

1) David E. Martin & Peter N. Coe. *Training distance runners* 1991
pressups with legs on chair, p 195 fig 4.9
leg raises p 198, figure 4.15.

Francis W Hooton

**** Please take professional advice before starting any exercise programme**

New group for neuro-diverse adults in the North East

I am starting up a group for neuro-diverse adults in the North East of England, run by neuro-diverse adults. (ND adults being anyone with ASD, Asperger syndrome, ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's syndrome or something similar.) A formal diagnosis is not essential in order

to join. We hope to be able to assist people in getting a diagnosis if that is what they want.

For more details please contact:

Russell Stronach
0191 259 6384
russelljstronach@tiscali.co.uk

Asperger social group – Nottingham

The Nottingham group will soon be re-starting. If anyone would like to participate please ring me at the number below. I hope to hear from you soon.

Antony 077 1941 9279

Hi, my name is Nicholas and I have been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome ...

I see myself as an aspie and I feel the way I perceive the world is different perhaps to a non-aspie and this does not make it easy for me to understand others, and they me. They can lack a kind of empathy towards me as I can to them, though I often feel my empathy with the average person is better than the empathy the average person has with me.

I was born in 1969 but I was not diagnosed with Asperger syndrome (AS) until 1998 and I didn't manage to get any information about it until 2001. I had to look for it myself. There was no one to help me.

When I was a child I was seen as having a learning difficulty, I was slow to comprehend and I had language difficulties. I had to see a speech and language therapist. I found it hard to concentrate and still do. I am always getting distracted.

I still have a comprehension and speech difficulty and I feel this is why I am still a slow learner although I do not think that I am below average intelligence.

In the past I had some tests done and my logical reasoning skills were found to be in the top quarter of the population for my age group. However I was told that my scoring was a little odd as my other results showed me as having average ability or a little above. However, the experts didn't understand why my mathematical ability should be so poor. It is quite below average, I'm afraid, and I have great difficulty with mathematical concepts. I feel quite stupid at times.

My mother has told me that when I was little I didn't seem to respond to sounds appropriately and the doctor wondered if I might be deaf. When he clapped his hands behind my head, I did not respond.

I love to read. I love space. The good thing about having AS is that it enables me to never stop feeling excited about the things I read and the images I watch on video, no matter how many times I see them over the years.

With AS I find it difficult to deal with all the noise and disruption going on around me. I feel I need everything in order. If I go at a slow pace I feel more in control. If I go too fast or talk too fast I get, I suppose, over stimulated and I end up doing silly things or saying silly jokes and not thinking about what I'm saying. The problem is caused, I suppose, by unpredictable or excess activity going on in the environment around me. I cannot perform well at this alien environmental pace. I need to find my own pace.

I feel I miss out a lot when reading or even more so when listening to someone talking because I have a fairly simple vocabulary and I cannot understand some of the more complicated context words, as I call them. When I read a sentence in one of my books I have to read it a few times and then look at keywords and think hard about what they mean. I try and visualise what the sentence is saying in order to commit to some form of understanding. My eyes dance from the sentence I am trying to read onto another and it's hard to focus. I am distracted by other sights and sounds around me. I read better in a quiet and darkened room. Red light is better than white light, which is why I have a red light bulb.

I have a good memory. I can remember being bathed in the sink as a baby and my mum talking to the next door neighbour. I find, from my perception, that other people turn the colour up too high on the T.V. but they have said to me that I have the colour turned down too much. I have been told that it looks as if I'm watching a black & white T.V. but to me it's bursting with colour. I have read how people with AS may perceive things in an idiosyncratic way. I find that it's difficult to put my thoughts into words, either in conversation or when I'm writing.

If I learn something I may remember what I've learnt but not remember the words that I need in order to explain it to another person. I may even substitute inappropriate words or miss out key parts, not realising that I have done so. The other person then doesn't understand me or they say I'm wrong, but when they tell me the correct answer it is frustrating to me to find it is often just what I had thought I had said. I had seen it in picture form in my head but I suppose I had failed to articulate that picture without realising it.

My thoughts are a combination of words and pictures, like everybody else's, but with me it's too many images and not enough words. Other people with AS have suggested that they think more 'visually' than the non AS person. I can understand what I'm saying to people but they only hear my words, they cannot have the empathy with the images in my head, and it's not enough because my use of language is poor compared to my visual thinking. What I'm suggesting is that most people use a better mix of visuals and language than myself. My thinking is more visual.

Thanks, Nicholas

*Hope we receive some of your words and pictures again
John (Ed)*



Dear Sir

Many years ago, before I knew I had Asperger syndrome, I attended a course of Gestalt Body Language Therapy in London. It is not a thing I would wish to do again.

On one occasion we were paired off, had to stand facing each other and say each other's Christian names. When it was my turn with one of the leaders, she said her feeling was wanting to bring me to life but being unable to do so.

Obviously she did not know anything about Asperger syndrome.

Yours faithfully,

M Barker

Hello. I'm Nathan and I live in the Rhondda Cynon Taff area. Are there any musicians and singers in South Wales who would like to get together to play? I am seventeen and I play guitar (both electric and classical) and piano.

I'd like to 'jam' with electric guitar and also to play classical or folk stuff with other instrumentalists. I like playing classic rock/blues and to write songs.

Perhaps you could contact me through *Asperger United*.

Dear Readers

I am hoping to do a readers' poll. I am looking for suggestions on the possibility of forming a community where people with Asperger syndrome and high functioning autism can live nearby each other, and get the support they need as well.

I was wondering if any of you are interested in living close to each other. Please do let me know if you are. I am sure many of you suffer from loneliness too.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Tarr

Thanks, Julie. Certainly a thought provoking idea.

John

Dear John

Thank you for the last edition of *Asperger United*. I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome (AS) in the early 90s, when I lived in Peterborough. I am now 41 years old. The following is how I feel about AS.

Facial expressions – people with AS find it difficult to understand if someone is angry or telling a joke.

Colours – if someone says green or blue I can understand but if someone says beige or lilac I get very confused.

Trying to do different things at the same time – two things at once are difficult

Having a bad temper – but then everybody does and if you are not disabled it's alright, nothing more would be thought of it

Finding it difficult to express feelings

Joining in with other people – whatever it is, it's difficult.

Sometimes I do things that I am not aware of

People with AS find it difficult to look at other people

I had anorexia and bulimia for three years. When I made myself sick it would make me feel better.

People with Asperger syndrome get anxious very often

Some AS people have strange hobbies. My hobbies are films. I really like British and American films. I like to write down the cast lists (all of them) – who does the music, sings the songs – everything. Christmas is another one. I'm always telling people, as much as three months in advance, how many days there are until Christmas day. At the end of September I start sending out Christmas cards to people.

I am married. I have a wonderful wife who is an artist. I have two wonderful children – boys, aged 6 and nine months, none of whom have any of the problems I have.

Mark

Dear Mark - AU apologises for not being able to publish the whole of your article.



How to reply to Pen Pals

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

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

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

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

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

My name is David. I was born in Newcastle upon Tyne and I am 20 years old. I have Asperger syndrome and I am looking for pen pals who I can write to (letter/email) and share interests with. I live with my parents, but I am hoping to live with friends in the next few years, and my dog, Jenna. I went to main-stream school and got 9 GCSEs. I have many interests including music, TV, animals, art, history, travelling, maths, railways, inventions, landmarks, woodwork and model collecting (TV & film related) and going out. I hope to make new pen pals, who I can talk to through letters and emails.

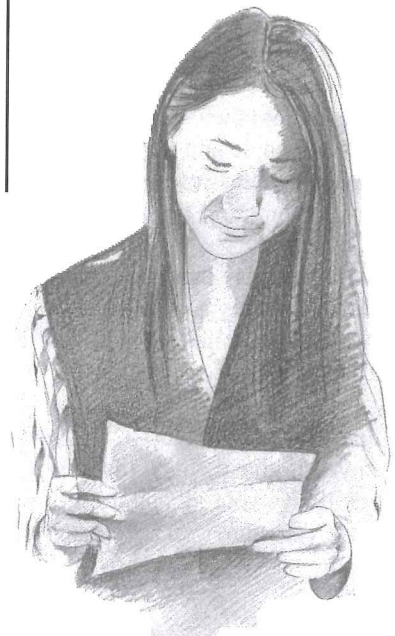
Hello, my name is Ben, I'm 15, have AS and I live in the West Midlands. I enjoy walking and cycling in the countryside, camping, shooting and going to the cinema.

I'm looking for a pen pal (any age or gender) who will occasionally exchange letters with me.

Hi, all! My name is Andrew, I'm almost 18 years old, and I have Asperger syndrome. I live in Enfield, north London, and my hobbies include computers, video games, sci-fi films (particularly *Terminator*, *Star Wars* and *Alien*), *Harry Potter*, cycling, going to youth club, and surfing the web. I have a part time job in Sainsbury's, and I am currently doing a full time computer maintenance course at Southgate College. Computers are my all-consuming 'Asperger obsession', and it gets me into trouble even now.

I'm looking for a pen-pal, with or without an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), between 16 and 21, preferably female, and living in London. I'd like to make friends with someone, possibly someone with a friend or relative with an ASD, someone with whom I can freely discuss Asperger stuff.

I am Nathan and I'm 17 years old. I go to a Welsh language school (but I speak English too!) and I've just started A/S levels. I've got Asperger syndrome and I'd like to hear from other people about my own age. I like music (classical, folk and some rock) and films.



Pen pals continued on back page

This is a poem that my 13year old son, who has ASD wrote to his headmaster. He has been out of school since an incident there in January 03.

I feel so lonely all the time every day is the same,
I wonder were there happier times,
watching for a visitor that never came,
do they remember all my crimes?

How do you start all over again?
Tell me where does it begin?
Why no sun but always rain,
did none of you ever sin?

What does a loser do,
When everything is lost,
How do you make your life new,
how do you begin when life is past?

I am a stranger you don't even know me,
we're not even friends you know,
when you look what do you see,
the worst of the worst, the low of the low.

I'll never know which way to go,
how to make the wrong things right,
I know the answer's always no,
I am in the dark and not the light.

I'm on my way to somewhere with no place to go,
when the world turns you down and it's too messed up,
school doesn't want me so I'll stay thick you know,
the tree of knowledge not mine to sup.

Some kids think they are really tough,
doing school work what a hope,
days for teachers long and rough,
acting hard cause they smoke dope.

After school they go about
rude to people and they shout
they steal and swear and make a mess
you just ignore it I can guess.

Come next day they start again
playing up they act the same
they are welcomed through your door
it's alright you never saw.

I am evil they are not
so you'll give them all the lot
you'll give your all and try to teach them
don't you know you'll never reach them.

My name is Rebecca and I am 9 years old. My sister Flora has dyslexia and I have recently been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. I have written a poem and Mum thought I ought to send a copy of it to you. She thinks it may encourage people to learn about autism. I also think it may give people who have a form of autism more confidence. I hope you like it.

My name is Rebecca
(and it is written in a file,
that I have Asperger's syndrome)
and my surname is Miles.

I'm 9 years old and I think
that it's a perfect age.
I easily get upset,
I also throw the odd rage!

I get these stupid obsessions,
that sometimes can be bad.
For if I talk about them lots
my mum gets really mad!

Some foods make me hyper,
especially stuff that's red.
I also get stomach ache
If I eat too much bread.

I've been to four schools
and none of them worked out.
If I go to many more,
I'll go quite mad no doubt.

I have sleeping problems,
my average is midnight.
I'm also frightened of the dark,
so I have to have a nightlight!

Most people think me weird or strange.
But I just say, "Hey wait!"
Just because I'm not like you
doesn't mean I'm second rate!

So for all the people out there
who are different in any form.
If you ever feel distressed,
just think "No one's the norm!"

Autism

What is it to be Different
What is it to be the Same
What is it to be Autistic
When Everybody's acting the Same.

J Powell

Vincent's Death - a short story

Vincent was a vampire, he didn't want to be one, he had always looked for a cure but he finally gave up. He couldn't find anything and the police were nosy with his victims. He couldn't understand what was interesting about a dead body but the police were baffled by his victims, since they had been drained of blood.

Vincent looked young and was an albino, and most of his victims had called him names before being shredded by claws. Vincent had difficulty disguising himself due to his claws, the two finger claws and the thumb claw, which were made from bone. Vincent normally had to use magic to hide his claws – if he got shot he had to pretend to be dead until no one was there.

He was now in a pub, somewhere in the US, getting drunk to overcome his depression about being a vampire. By now he had passed out from all the vodka when the police came in asking about one of Vincent's victims so he woke up and used magic to blow up a fire hydrant, which an unlucky cat was near.

Vincent hated the police; he thought of them as nosy idiots. They hadn't solved at least one of his 142 victims this year, so he decided to leave a clue. He chipped a bit of his claw off, about one centimetre, and put it in his pocket, and fed on a homeless guy, then left the chip on the body and made claw marks on the wall.

He wanted to see if they could find him in the act, so he went to a police station and stuck his claws through a door and was shot 10 times. He had never been shot before. It couldn't kill him but it hurt like hell, so he collapsed and they interrogated him.

'What are you?' said the man,

'I'm a thing,' he replied, mockingly. 'The drain blood case, I did 'em all.' I'm going to prison, thought Vincent. Vincent arrived, had his claws wrapped in a material so that they were harmless, and eventually untied himself in a cell. Suddenly, Vincent felt hungry. He had forgotten to eat, and now he was locked up back in the medical room.

'Doctor, what's wrong with that... er... thing?' asked a guard watching Vincent lying on the ground. 'That thing needs blood twice a day, it must have only had one meal today'

'Be careful,' replied the doctor, 'he can take a bullet in the head without getting hurt'.

Back in his cell, the other prisoners, not knowing about Vincent's curse, was teasing him. 'Albino! Albino!' they chanted. Vincent had had enough, he was hungry and mad, he kicked madly at the door with his clawed foot until it broke, and grabbed the nearest prisoner, and drained him of a certain red liquid.

'Aaah, B-Negative. I love that stuff...' he said, and ran out of prison into a church, and arrested a priest, got nervous and got a cross out. Vincent hated vampire legends, the only way a vampire can die is if it had no blood to drink – Vincent went to a pub.

He went to a gun shop and bought a minigun which he put in a bag with infinite space in it. By now, Vincent was drunk, so he staggered into a job centre looking for a job. He got a job in the army.

When he went on his first mission, he had not bothered with his gun, and slashed everyone to pieces whilst drinking blood when out of sight. He eventually got the nickname 'The Bloody Albino'. He became a pilot but got sick of his plane, so he modified it into a very good plane and lined it with Kevlar, and then he knew how he could die.

He plunged his claws into his chest and ripped his heart out and passed away happily.

By Brett Hope – 13 yrs old

What a vivid imagination you have Brett. How about sending us something a little less blood thirsty next time!

Short stories always welcome

John - Editor

Garden Sculpture Project

Spectrum self-help group are looking for new members and volunteers for this learning space of natural patterns

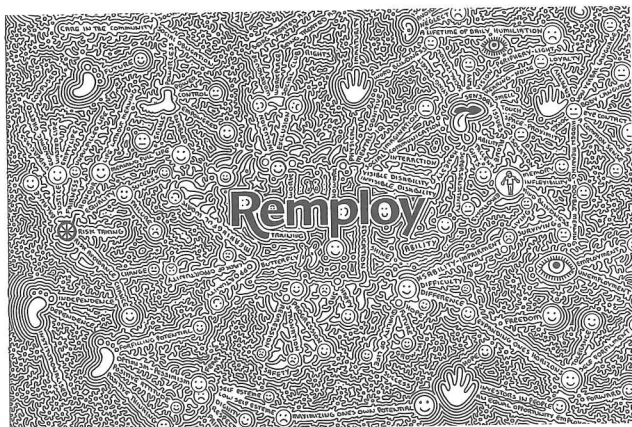
We are Islington based

Programme includes:

Sunday mentoring scheme for new comers. Weekday individual retreat and volunteer gardening opportunities
Saturday club with bonfires and sculpture making

Tel: 0208 806 1129

Email: yellruthtoday@YAHOO.CO.UK



For over 50 years, Remploy have been expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the UK. They are the UK's largest employer of people with disabilities, employing over 11,400 individuals at present, 90% of whom have some form of disability. Over the last five years they have found jobs for

over 5,000 disabled men and women in the electrical manufacturing and service industries, of which they are one of the UK's leading contractors.

Remploy try to help employees towards full independence by providing assistance in their progression into open employment. They provide

employment for people with a wide range of mental, emotional and physical disabilities both at their own premises and within other companies. 4,500 people are currently supported within 2,500 different companies nationwide, with a customer list including major companies such as Ford, Unipart, Toshiba and Procter and Gamble.

Remploy also focus on training and education issues relating to the employment of people with disabilities. They run seminars and workshops about the disability issues within the equal opportunities framework.

They have over 80 factories stretching from

Aberdeen in Scotland to Penzance on the south-west coast. Their factories are strategically placed on the main road and rail networks, and they all have easy access to air and sea transport in order to co-operate with export markets.

Words - James Mariner

Picture - Peter Myers

For further information contact :

Remploy Ltd
Stone Court
Siskin Drive
Coventry
CV4 4FJ

0800 138 7656
info@remploy.co.uk

Christmas – Stressmas or Depressmas?

I wonder if any other readers find Christmas as stressful as I do? To me it is a multitude of stressful things all happening at once, such as trying to work out what to give to who as presents. The shops are full of santas and snowmen and tacky music for months before the event, building up and building up to what can be an anticlimax. Good quality pop groups like Slade and U2 produce songs that are total rubbish. Everybody's having fun? As Ricky Tomlinson would say, My a**e! A few weeks before Christmas the population seems to double, as the shops and streets are heaving with stressed adults and overexcited kids, and the roads get even more clogged with cars. I think Christmas should be renamed Santamas as it seems nowadays to be about worshipping an old gentleman in red who brings pre-

sents, as he appears in every shop display, and is sung about ad nauseum as coming to town. I'm not a practising Christian but regret that the original meaning appears to have been quite lost.

On top of it all, despite the false promise of snow on every Christmas card and TV advert, the rain pours down a lot in December, and the sky is often relentlessly grey. Global warming's put paid to snow. I find drizzle more penetratingly cold than snow as it stays airborne for longer and sticks to the face and hands. There are all the images of snowmen - a rainman might be more appropriate, at least for the likes of us.

What I'd like to see are quieter Christmases with places where people can get away from Christmas without having to leave the country (The present worldwide atmosphere

of intolerance makes it dodgy for British in some countries). A time when Christmas is meaningful and not just a santa worshipping marketing ploy that promotes excess in everything.

The only thing I like about Christmas are the fairy lights, brightening up the long, dark, damp nights, including houses that are covered in them. There's something to be said about that particular American import, although it uses a lot of electricity. It would be worth people having a little wind generator to light elaborate displays.

Yours faithfully

Sue Burden

Aged 32 for a person who wanted to know my age in a recent *AU*, who was looking for penfriends.

Here is an article for Asperger United. Thank you for the great magazine! I hope you are able to print this

About a Boy: a review of a moving film by Ben Good

Nick Hornby is a writer who has a young son with autism. He lives in London and has helped to set up schools for children with autism. A couple of years ago one of his books was made into an award winning film. I found 'About a Boy' fantastic and decided to write a short review.

This film is a powerful account of the friendship between an unhappy child and a shallow single man in his 30s.

Hugh Grant plays Will, a character living a dream life. He lives each day in units of time, with no need to work (he survives off the royalty money from a hit song his late father wrote) he spends each 30 minute unit doing some form of self centred activity such as shopping for music or using a health club. However there is loneliness to his life, constantly buying expensive toys, eating out in classy restaurants and never sticking with anything for very long. Then Will meets Marcus an unhappy twelve year old, who is suffering bullying at school and lives with his mentally unstable single mother. The young actor Nicholas Hoult plays this role amazingly well and deserves an excellent future in film. Although his character does not have Asperger syndrome, I am sure many people can relate to his unhappiness. We are shown playground bullying in such a way that must strike a chord with anyone who has ever suffered in this way due to Asperger syndrome.

Marcus meets Will after a picnic in Regents Park (organised by a single parents' group) and decides that he would make a perfect companion for his troubled mother. Hugh is awkward and negative about this persistent boy for much of the film. However, several afternoons spent watching *Countdown* on television slowly binds their friendship.

I shall not give the whole story away because you may want to see the film yourself. I rented it on DVD from my local library in north London. I suggest that you check your library because they are improving a lot these days. Also, DVDs are often packed with extra features like director's commentaries and extra scenes. Plus unlike a VHS cassette, the quality is always good with a DVD.

I recently received my first copy of Asperger United, which I found very interesting. This is a review of the film, Daredevil, that I hope your readers who enjoy films might find interesting - Rick Benford

DareDevil

Another superhero hits the town in the form of *The Man Without Fear* AKA *Daredevil*, one of Stan Lee's finest creators from the Marvel comic. He was also the man behind the smash hit, *Spiderman*, *The Incredible Hulk* and *The Fantastic Four*. *Daredevil* is a thought-provoking and flashy science-fiction extravaganza that explodes deep into the darkest forces of superheroes, by far darker than *Batman*. Ben Affleck is excellent and, despite not being a typical superhero or action star he surprisingly succeeds.

Affleck plays Matt Murdock, a lawyer by day; he was blinded as a child in a freak accident involving chemicals and developed superhero powers. He has super-sensitive hearing and highly developed senses which give him the ability to detect a beautiful woman from the other side of the room. At night he's a super cool superhero known as DareDevil, who stalks the city and waits for evil, so justice is done.

The evil in question is Bulleye, played brilliantly by ex Ballykissangel star, Colin Farrell, who manages to make a very believable villain whilst being tongue-in-cheek. DareDevil also finds time to romance the lovely Jennifer Garner who plays the stunningly beautiful Elektra, who looks amazing in a black leather suit sporting blades.

Daredevil is an extremely well made film and has everything going for it. A handsome superhero, a beautiful girl, cool villains and of course a story, so what could go wrong? Well it's a 3 star film and what stops it from being a 5 star film?

Simply the fact that it's only ninety minutes long and has a clichéd ending. Affleck and Garner are both fine but the villainy doesn't quite have the same determination as The Green Goblin had in *Spiderman*. *DareDevil* was the first superhero movie of the year. Whether it will top the likes of, *The X Men* sequel and *The Incredible Hulk* I don't know, but nevertheless it will definitely be a box office hit.

Director Mark Steven Johnson stages some stunning fight sequences, great sets and brilliant special effects, but sadly can't get it as good or exciting as *Spider man*. Still this is a very entertaining slice of superhero mayhem of the best kind.

Pen pals continued...

My name is Gareth. I am 19 years old and live in Suffolk. I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at the age of 7. The past few years have been very difficult (having to deal with people who do not believe that I have Asperger syndrome and those who do not understand). I have had to spend most of my time clearing up all my terrible messes, without much success. Most of my ordinary situations feel just like a person with a

morbid fear of heights being made to climb the world's tallest building. Over the past eight years I have become increasingly isolated and I really do not like it. I am currently trying to get in contact with and subscribe to autism/Asperger syndrome organisations across the world, to chat to and get to know other people in the same situation. I thought you might like to hear from me. Please contact via *AU*.

My name is Darren, I have Asperger syndrome and I am 25 years old. I was wondering if there is anybody out there, living in the Warrington area, who would be interested in doing a Duke of Edinburgh award expedition with me. We are currently planning our practice route, planned for April 04 and are aiming for the main route to take place in June 04.

If you're interested, please contact me via *AU*.

Hi, my name is David and I am 19 years old. I am looking for a companion who enjoys walking, cycling, swimming, camcording, photography and air band listening! I have Asperger syndrome and often feel quite lonely, as I find it really difficult to make friends. I was hoping to meet up with anyone in the North Yorkshire area or West Yorkshire, although preferably in the Harrogate, Knaresborough, Ripon, Wetherby or Leeds areas.

My name is Kerry. I'm 16 and have AS. I live in Nottinghamshire. I am in sixth form at my local school studying maths and IT. I am a big fan of the Nottingham Panthers ice hockey team. My hobbies include ice skating, watersports and playing musical instruments.

My name is James, I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome when I was 30. I am now 41. I am temporarily living with my parents because of problems with a neighbour at my own flat. Life can get a bit much at times and I wondered if there's anybody who is looking for friendship leading to hopefully a relationship. Other than my parents

I've not got anyone my own age to go out with. My interests are collecting model cars, DVD's and watching soaps and quiz things. Other interests are: all sorts of music but Elvis Presley, The Beatles and rock 'n' roll music 1950's - 80's are my favourite. I like going out for meals and shows etc. but don't go out as much as I would like to.

My name is Cheryl. I'm 17 and I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in 1997. I have great difficulties with interaction and social situations, and because of this I am extremely isolated and lonely.

I am able to put on a façade in order to 'survive' situations such as family gatherings, but the stress and pain this causes me is too great for me to maintain for long periods of time.

The past few months have been awful for me. I have become extremely distressed due to my isolation. One of the only things which has kept me sane is my love of rock music, especially Nirvana. Contrary to what most people would say about

Nirvana, their music has been one of the only things which seem to make my life worth living. Kurt Cobain was and still is an inspirational legend! I also like Alanis Morissette, as she has an amazing voice, she can play loads of instruments, and many of her songs are inspirational too.

I've been learning to play the guitar and I can now strum a few chords! This is another thing which gives me some hope.

I would like to hear from anybody with AS who is feeling the same sense of desperation, or maybe someone who has been through a similar thing and has found a way to overcome it. I would welcome any suggestions!

My name is Nicholas. I am 34 and have Asperger syndrome. I am looking for pen pals who understand what it's like to live with AS.



Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road,
London EC1V 1NG.
Telephone: 020 7833 2299. Fax: 020 7833 9666.
Email: asp.utd@nas.org.uk
Website: www.nas.org.uk

