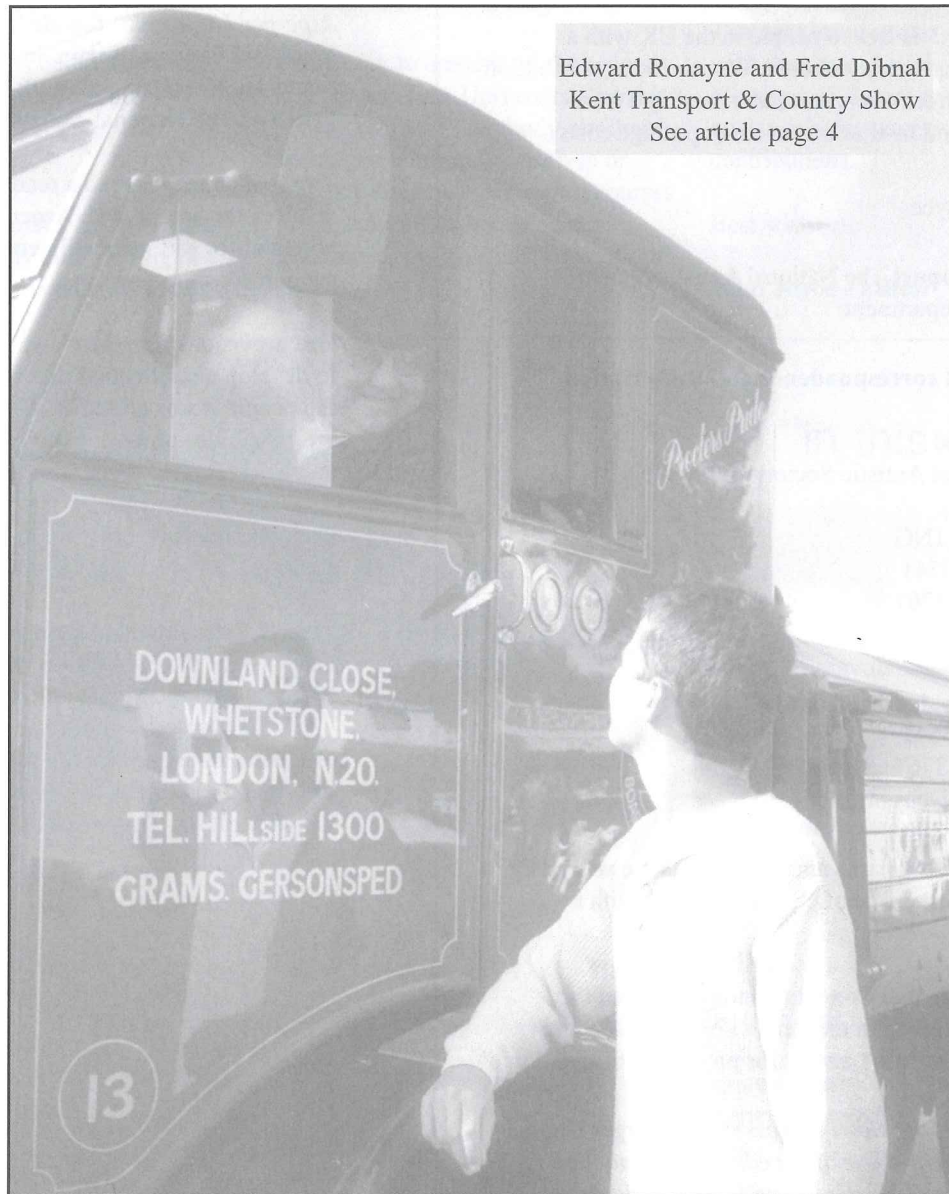


Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

# Asperger *united*

Edition 38 April 2004



The National  
Autistic Society



*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

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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.*

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

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*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.

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## Dear Readers

Welcome to the latest edition of your newsletter. I Hope you are all well and looking forward to some warmer weather.

As usual I thank you for the high standard of your contributions. Your work has tempted me to use my job with *AU* as an example of 'work of value' in a promotion application I have just made.

We recently had a complaint from a reader who was very disturbed by the content of a pen pal letter she received.

The National Autistic Society took this very seriously and investigated on the recipient's behalf. We are

hoping this was a 'one-off' as the pen pal page has been running successfully for many years now and this is the first time anything unpleasant has ever happened.

It would be a great pity if we had to close the pen pal page, which is what we would have to do if this kind of thing happens again. Please be careful when writing a reply.

I am about to embark on the second level of an Open University Spanish course. If there's anybody out there seeking to educate themselves or who has done any interesting courses then please let us know. Your experience may inspire some of our readers.

Please keep those contributions coming in. I'm sorry if you're still waiting to see yours in print, there is a waiting list, but please be assured your article/poem/artwork will eventually be published. We're pretty short on artwork so if you have anything that you think would make an interesting *AU* cover then please send it in.

The next issue is due out in July so until then may I wish you all the blessings of Easter and thank you once again for your excellent contributions.

Best wishes

**John Joyce - Editor**



## in this edition

Editorial	3
Feature: My involvement with steam	4
Poetry / writing	5
Letters to the editor	6
Pen pals	7
Poetry	8
More pen pals / news	9
Feature: readers' experience - moving house	10/11
Nottingham Asperger social group - reader's comment	11
News / film review	12



## My involvement with steam by Edward Ronayne

I started my interest with steam when I was just a year old and it was *Thomas the Tank Engine* that started it all off. I loved Thomas so much that I showed allegiance towards it, collecting videos, toys (mainly die-cast), models, books and sometimes going to steam railways for 'Thomas' events.

When I was about ten years old, it all started to fade away and I decided to look on the serious side of my interest. I'm now part of a number of clubs which are to do with steam or in a similar field and they are Steam Apprentice Club (SAC), Welling & District Model Engineering Society (WDMES) and the Romney Marsh Model Engineering Society.

I joined the SAC on 1 September 2001 but didn't start learning to use traction engines until 21 April the following year. On that day, I learned to use three engines at Chatham Historic Dockyard. The engines I used were a 1914 Aveling & Porter 10 tone E class roller called Hengist, a 1923 Fowler T3 tractor called Sir Douglas and a circa 1920 Grafton Dockyard crane. Hengist is owned by Steve but I don't know his surname. Sir Douglas is owned by Tony from Orpington. I can't remember the crane owner's name, but never mind.

The Chatham Dockyard driving day wasn't the only thing I was involved in. Also on 30 August that year, I attended the Great Dorset Steam Fair and I was allocated 1917 Garrett Showman's tractor called Margaret. The engine's owner is Richard from Eldersfield and I had quite a good time although I only spent five hours on the engine. We didn't move anywhere because it's a showman's engine and it stays parked in the line up with the other showman's engines.

When I turned up at the Essex Steam & Country Show in September for a

normal visit, I was in for a surprise. When the engines left the arena at the end of the grand parade, Tony, whom I had met before was on his way out with Sir Douglas, his engine. He recognised me and stopped for me to get on board and steer it to its parking place!

My next event was the Leighton Buzzard Bypass rally on 1 June the following year where I was allocated a 1928 Aveling & Porter 5-ton tractor which was driving a stone crusher. The engine is owned by Sandy from Redbourn.

The Great Bucks Steam and Country fair was my next event on 3 August the same year. I was allocated on 1928 Fowler 12.5 ton DNB Roller called Undaunted. The roller is owned by Robert from Reading and has the addition of tar-spraying equipment.

My most recent event was the Essex Steam and Country Show again but this time I was allocated an engine. It was a 1917 Fowler Ploughing engine called Giant Tiger. The engine is owned by J. Philpot & Son from Billericay but it was driven by a man named Trevor.

I also learned to drive 5" gauge railway locomotives around the W&DMES track. In November last year, Reg Hawes, the club's secretary gave me permission to drive because I wrote a letter to him telling him that I had already learned to drive but I can't drive without supervision until I'm eighteen or give rides to the public.

I also have a personal collection of three Mamod live steam models, a brass boilered tractor, a showman's engine and a stationary engine with the addition of a workshop. At the moment I'm saving up for a 3.5" loco called Tich. Tich is being sold by ME Sale & Exchange for £750. Tich is an 0-4-0T designed by LBSC and has a slip eccentric valve gear. It

has the advantages of being so small that you can load it onto the track without any problems; it is easy to build/maintain, and has attractive proportions but it suffers the disadvantages of being tight on fuel capacities, pulling power which is so low that it can only pull about one or two people including the driver. Because of the slip eccentric valve gear, it can't reverse by itself and has difficulties climbing hills. But it's a classic model to engineers.

Also, when I'm shown how to use a lathe, I'll take on a project, it's another 3.5" gauge loco, an 0-4-0ST called Conway. I'm going to rename it Joseph Buncombe in memory of my late grandad and to avoid confusion with somebody else's loco. Conway is freelance 0-4-0ST designed by Martin Evans and has influences from many well known manufacturers e.g. Hunslet. It has outset frames (that's why it's a Hunslet - like loco), a Stephenson's valve gear and quite a number of advantages as it is a very simple loco to build. It is powerful enough to pull a whole trainload of people compared to Tich or Juliet, another 0-4-0T designed by LBSC, and also has a slip eccentric valve gear.

I also have a few friends, Jonathan and Joshua, who are interested in this kind of environment. Jonathan is a complete GWR maniac and sometimes comes with me on W&DMES club days. Joshua shares the majority of my interests and I sometimes invite him on trips out too.



Edward driving 5" gauge 4-4-2 "Arthur Moore" around the W&DMES track

**Dear John.**

I too am on an HFA journey. I'm 65, a retired optometrist and live in the middle of the triangle formed by St Albans, Watford and Hemel Hempstead. Diagnosed Asperger by Pat Howlin back end of 2001, and have found *Asperger United* a great help.

I joined Contact, the social group for adults, at that time and have been threatening to go to a Pub Night ever since. I kept putting it off but finally on Wednesday 11 Feb I made it and would like to relate my experience.

I left home at 5.00pm and was in London within the hour. The journey was a big step but I found the doing was not so bad as the thinking about it. I took a fast train from Watford Junction to Euston and then walked along to Baker Street, as I couldn't face the underground. I located the Metropolitan Bar and once inside walked through and easily recognised the Contact group sitting in the non-smoking area.

As I am writing this I realize I am ignoring the underlying conflict and struggle that was going on in my mind as I have been some sort of recluse in the past and found groups and gatherings a nightmare. I locked myself in the loo when I got to the venue to get my head and breath back.

I was immediately welcomed to the group. There was Edward on my right, a mental health nurse and first timer at Contact from Stratford, and on my left, Janet also a first timer from Chichester. Alex, a member of the group, introduced himself. Gavin and Samantha, both from the NAS, spent time with me. Good people! I stayed for

about an hour and a half, had a pint of lager and some grub, rather nervously, then made my way back home. I hit my carport at 9.35pm and indoors my lady wife Ann gave me the greatest welcome. "Hello darling, I've been fretting about you."

I wrote my thoughts about the trip in my diary that evening:

*Feelings of connection but yet my feelings of alienation still there. Feelings of being in control. Ability of holding it all together and feelings of OK with my personal comfort. Realising that I am as impaired as anybody in the gathering and for all that I have achieved what I have in life with no regrets or bitterness.*

And a couple of days later although I had a strong reaction to having pushed myself into action. (a bruised head!) I was quietly proud of myself with a strong sense of achievement.

I was surrounded by people I feel understand in one way or another, whose journeys must have a similar strand to mine, who have wrestled with the pain of disconnection, of alienation, and have obviously come to grips with it and are able to sit in a group and begin to enjoy the feeling.

I did it - I made it. I pushed my boundaries while accepting my limitations.

**P Harrison.**

**Dear John**

I am trying my hand at writing poetry for the first time since I was a teenager. I am 59, diagnosed with AS at 56. I am now semi-retired after working for 32 years as a university lecturer.

My decision to give up work followed a series of disasters and near breakdown as a result of being asked to do admin tasks that I didn't understand, instead of being allowed to continue simply teaching, which I do well, as I am good at dealing with facts; I just can't handle discussion, decision-making or politics.

A year ago I became a Christian. This poem expresses both the relief I felt at knowing that there was a name and a scientific definition of the way I am, not the shameful label of 'fool.' I am also trying to share the way my faith helps me to make sense of what it means to be me.

**J. Wakely**

## Gooseberry Pudding

I am not a fool,  
A fool is a gooseberry pudding.  
It is soft, frothy and green, and served with a  
squirt of cream.

I am neither frothy nor soft nor green.  
I am much too large to fit in a serving dish.  
I am a human being, made in the image of  
God my creator.  
It has taken billions of years of evolution and  
nine months in my mother's womb to make  
me.  
No gooseberry pudding could achieve such a  
miracle.

Therefore my creator is not a gooseberry  
pudding, and I am not a gooseberry pudding.  
I am not a fool

*Lovely words  
John - Editor*





## letters to the editor

**Dear John**

We write on behalf of our son, who has Asperger syndrome and certain learning disabilities.

We noted with interest the letter from Julie Tarr in the January 2004 edition of *Asperger United* about the possibility of forming a community for people with Aspergers' and similar conditions.

On behalf of our son, we should like to say that we think it is an excellent idea and we would be most interested in being kept informed regarding any developments.

*This is just one of the many letters we received supporting Julie Tarr's idea of forming an Asperger community (Asperger United issue 37). All letters were passed on to Julie.*

*Message from Julie - Thank you all very much for your letters of support. I very much hope that we can take this matter further. If there are any developments I will let you know.*

*With very best wishes - Julie Tarr*

**Dear John**

I've set up a website called 'Youth Aspergers' and it's for people aged 13-21. I've looked for Aspergers websites that were aimed at teenagers and found hardly any so I set up my own.

Being a teenager myself, I feel that this time is the most important in our lives. You start to form long term relationships, make friends etc. This social side is very hard for people with Aspergers and I think it's harder with teenagers as this is where they take the step from childhood into adulthood.

At the moment I have six members on my website message board and they seem very impressed with the way my site has been put together. A lot of them also feel that more teenage Asperger sites should be set up, so they are very pleased with mine.

My site has information, useful links, helpful books etc. It also has a message board, guest book and chat room. I am hoping for some new members soon from all over the world. If you wish to visit my website go to:

<http://www.youthaspergers.tk/>

**I hope to see you there sometime soon - Anna**

**Dear AU**

I have only just started receiving your newsletter and have already found it very helpful.

I am 48 years old and have only recently found out about Asperger syndrome by accident, (I overheard a social worker talking about it at work). I think I have probably got it. I have now been referred by my GP for diagnostic tests at a specialist centre in Kent.

I have been working for Social Services for four years. I have encountered a variety of problems while working there - most of them related to the syndrome such as communication, coping with the workload and social skills problems. My manager thought I definitely had some sort of mental health problem but did not know about this syndrome. She assisted me in finding out about Asperger syndrome on the Internet and also thought that I probably did have it. That motivated me to go to my GP.

I also believe I have encountered many difficulties in my life because of the syndrome, although up to now I have just put it down to bad luck, poor economy and being introverted and shy. As for employment, I am well qualified - I have a degree in Law but I have not been able to have a legal career. I have also had trouble making close friends and relationships and people have taken advantage of me in the past.

One of the biggest problems with this syndrome, I think, is that if you have not got it that badly (and I think I have only got it very mildly), I would have still kept thinking that I possibly did have some slight disability but no one can do anything to really help me. I have to accept myself as a unique individual with a slight speech impediment, some communication and coordination problems and just being a bit of a loner and an "odd ball".

It is only with the support of my manager and student support services at a local college, where I am a part time evening student, that I have felt motivated to pursue getting a diagnosis for this syndrome.

Could you or any of your readers advise me about what the diagnostic tests involve, as I am slightly worried about taking these tests.

**Jan**

*Thank you for the good words Jan. Hope you soon find out one way or the other. Let us know.*

*John - Editor*



## 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*.

### **\*\*Important notice - please read\*\***

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

My name is Roy. I am 33 and was diagnosed with AS in 1987. I live in Yorkshire and graduated from university at the end of last year.

My main passions are my church (which forms much of my social life) and the board game Othello, this being one thing that I have excelled in. I have represented Great Britain in many competitions, including two World Championships.

Other significant interests are the Internet, watching TV, and following my favourite football team, Charlton Athletic. I have quite varied tastes in music - 80s pop though I listen more to artists like Delirious and Rebecca St. James.

My name is Neil. I am 43 years old. I would like pen pals of either sex and any age. I live in north west Kent.

I have Aspergers and through being alone so much I do a lot of studying. I have a B.Sc. through the Open University and take every opportunity to do courses in various subjects. At the moment I am doing a course in spread sheets. I worked for 11 years in London but went through a bad patch and had to give up my job recently, so am looking for another.

Among my interests are the following: chess, badminton, table tennis, rambling, music, reading (quite a lot of philosophy), animals, watching snooker. I belong to English Heritage and visit places of interest owned by them.

On the lighter side, I am a Doctor Who fan and am keen on science fiction. Also a keen Star Trekker.

My name is Peter. I am 24, have AS and live in York. I would be interested in making friends and pen pals anywhere. My interests are socialising at the pub, cycling, walking, swimming, going to the cinema and camcording. I also enjoy going abroad for my holidays, travelling, looking at places of interest like museums, and going to football matches. I have a varied taste in music and TV.





## Picture postcard view in Idaho Springs I'm missing someone like you

I keep changing the words on those jukebox rhymes.  
Just like I keep listening to the Bob Dylan song,  
Changing Of The Guard.

I keep watching the cable TV, and the Presidential  
Candidates, keep dropping out.  
I'm a front runner here, in Idaho Springs, with all my  
jokes?

At least they give me a limited standing in society, while  
I'm running about here.

I keep wishing there was someone here to love me true  
Maybe they all do?

As I have trouble working out what they're thinking  
here?

It's a picture postcard view.

Here I'm missing someone to love me true.

Life and death don't seem to matter as much, the other  
side of the World.

I have a feeling that life goes on forever here, no matter  
what.

Also that loving feeling about that missing someone in  
my life, comes on nice and hot.

I can't see that Debbie look alike, as she's now gone.

No-one here ever seems to be that someone

My mind can never seem to focus totally on the view.

I'm so high up here, that the sky a lot of the time is now  
blue.

I sometimes hope that, when I'm flying, I can meet that  
special you

It's a picture postcard view.

Here I'm missing someone to love me true.

These days things just aren't like that I suppose  
At this, kind of height who knows?

I go about feeling a bit light headed here.

They keep sending troops out to have

A crown of barbed wire around their heads.

Maybe love keeps the World going.

So these people, are never dead?

I can't stop feeling that these wars are wrong from being  
in my head.

It's a picture postcard view.

Here I'm missing someone to love me true.

I don't seem to have much luck meeting someone writing  
these.

Here there's loads of woods and trees to take someone.

As the days go by so does the hope of finding someone

Here my weight is just going down and down

And I'm now real slim.

Marshall Mathers mentions Denver in a lot of his songs.

Here I can't seem to meet someone

Odd times I've written into him for a song to meet  
someone.

It's a picture postcard view.

Here I'm missing someone to love me true.

**David C. Miedzianik**

**Written. 18th February 2004.**

*Thank you David.*

*John - Editor*

### Dear Friends

Thank you for an inspiring newsletter. I enclose a poem that I hope will strike a chord with people and make them  
feel positive - regards, Stuart Rowlands

### Making Friends

Like an actor without a script,  
Onto an alien world I've been tipped.  
The question that holds my fate  
Is 'how do I relate?'

Those whose legs are weak  
get the help they seek.  
One whose social skills are lame  
may limp on, lost and without aim.

In a game whose rules can mystify,  
like a baseball to the novice's eye.  
And when playground teams are picked,  
the one who's last is easy to predict.

Never knowing quite what friends were for,  
over books I've had to pore.  
Years of being quite reclusive  
makes finding friends more elusive.

But learning how to become greater  
makes it so much sweeter,  
When you overcome your fears  
and wipe away your tears.

So, if a friend is what you seek,  
stand up and don't seem meek.  
There are people who will like you.  
Just go up and speak.

*Very good Stuart. Hope it achieves its end. John - Editor*



**Dear Sir**

I experience the following symptoms and would be very pleased to correspond with anyone who has similar ones.

I have obsessions - music. I have a lot of CDs (about a hundred) and can memorise a piece of music perfectly. Gradually, my ability to recall the lists of songs in the charts has gone down but my general interest in music has remained strong. I still hear music going round in my head pretty much all of the time.

I am also obsessed about other people and their motives. I wonder why people are so cruel. Because of this lack of understanding of other people, they frighten me. I find it really difficult to cope with social situations. I miss the 'signs' that lead to the correct social interactions. I can only cope with socialising on a basic level and can completely miss the understanding of a more complex social interaction.

**T Webster**

### **Somerset Autistic Support Group**

Advice and Friendship Line

If you are coping with problems on the autistic spectrum please don't feel alone we are here to help.

If you live in our area please contact our new Somerset Communications Line on: **01823 324 997** for news of what is happening or write to

Jenny Barnes  
35 Roman Road  
Taunton  
TA1 2BG

Please enclose an SAE

We look forward to your support

**Looking for new members**  
**Memory Gardens, Islington**

The Sculpture Garden Project  
for people on the autistic spectrum  
Club held 12.00-3.00pm every other Sunday

For further details please contact Ruth Solomon:  
**0207 806 1129**  
**yellruthtoday@yahoo.co.uk**

**Hi all!**

My name is Nicholas. I'm 24 and have Asperger syndrome. I was diagnosed with AS in 1989. I had a rough time at both primary and secondary school, where I was bullied. I found it really difficult to mix with other pupils so I wasn't really friendly. I can now communicate with people but I don't speak loud enough although my speech is getting better and I can mix with people. I'm from Boston in Lincolnshire, where we have lived for 16 years.

I passed my GCSEs and moved on to college to do a foundation course. I then moved onto computing and got a certificate and pass after I finished the course. I then started a performing arts course. I found it a bit hard but I made some nice friends and mixed with the students. I enjoyed this course a lot as I learnt to act, sing and dance. I performed three shows at college and received a certificate for all my hard work at the end of year show. I only did this course for a year and I didn't get accepted to go any further because the tutors thought that I would be unable to cope. I was so gutted and depressed as performing is my hobby and I wanted to learn more. I've been learning to play the keyboard and I'm nearly on Grade 2. I can now play with chords and I'm singing on the karaoke.

My interests are horse riding, cycling, skating, computers, internet, music, movies, singing TV, sightseeing, transport, socialising and walking. I miss all my friends from college and I feel lonely.

I don't know what I'm going to do with myself now as I can't get a job, but I'm on a New Deal scheme at the moment, so maybe I might get some work later this year. I would like to go to Drama School. I've no one to go out with and I sometimes feel so lonely.

I'm looking for a female pen pal between the ages of 18 and 25. I would like to hear from any female with AS who is feeling the same way as me and would like to mix with people or maybe has been through a similar thing as me.

**Nicky**

Hi! My name is Tony. I am 31 years of age. I would like pen friends who share some of my interests such as hill walking, heavy metal rock music and some spiritual interest such as theosophy and Wicca.

### *Moving out ... by Michael Feldman*

I lived in Hackney for 52 years and independently of my parents from the age of 27 years.

Approximately 15 months after my father died, my mother approached the council to offer me accommodation nearby to my family. They kindly offered me a one bedroom flat and I lived there happily for almost 25 years, becoming independent with cooking, shopping, washing, ironing etc.

As time went by, Hackney was becoming dangerous. For example, I was mugged four times. However, having learnt to drive, it gave me some protection.

At my previous flat, my downstairs neighbour had a violent partner. He threatened me and tried to kick down my door. This was over unfounded allegations that I was following his girlfriend and his son, and supposedly banging in my flat.

While all of this was taking place, my sister Josephine and her husband approached me and asked if I would like to live in Ilford. I was then dubious about Ilford because I thought it was a teenager's paradise. However, after trying out the area, I became impressed and was happy to accept their offer. I was very grateful to my sister Josephine and my brother-in-law Alan for offering me the flat. I now had a certain sense of security, especially as I live above an elderly lady who is kind and considerate.

Other reasons for my move were to be near my family having lost my other sister almost three years previously through a brain haemorrhage. The other reason was that I wasn't having much of a social life. Pubs were closing because of poor trade and those that remained, I could not relate properly to. Other than that, the only other association that I had were with people I knew

working at the café in my local park and a friend Patrick living nearby.

Of course, leaving Hackney not only brought relief but also sadness too. Sad because of knowing so many people that I would be leaving, plus moving to a new area like Ilford and literally having to start all over again.

When the day came, things didn't run smoothly. The removal people underestimated the amount of belongings I had. Because of this, they had to make three trips. During this time my mother was helping me and at this point, she was becoming exhausted.

Shortly after my move and with the help of my mother, I unpacked and started to settle in. Within almost a fortnight I was able to sleep at my new flat for the first time. Eventually, the wall unit that my mother kindly bought for me arrived.

My other sister Norma who lives in Bristol with her husband Jim came down shortly after I'd settled into my new flat. Jim kindly assembled the wall unit for me. I also had a builder Trevor for odd jobs such as sawing the bottom off the doors. They were not closing properly because the new carpet was getting in the way.

Shortly before my move, I had to register with a new doctor and renew my claim for Jobseeker's Allowance at Ilford Job Centre. While all of these things were going on, I found the move a toll on my health. For example my blood pressure became high with associated dizzy spells. By this time I too was becoming exhausted.

If the move wasn't enough, the new Job Centre put pressure on me to find work. I told them that because I had autism, I remained limited in the type of work that I could do. I must have missed telling them the fact that

I had just moved into the area and needed to settle down before even thinking of work. Perhaps it's just as well that I didn't tell them about this. Sticking to my autism, I thought, went down better.

Once the Job Centre had assessed my claim, I saw my new Disability Employment Advisor. At that first interview, she told me that if I didn't find work, that some sort of action would be taken against me - or words to that effect. Still, without going into too much detail, the DEA came out with a remark saying, 'I am not here to be nice, if I were nice to everyone, I would not get home.' I was quite flabbergasted by this remark. I offered to work in the Job Centre but she said that this was not possible. I became angry and unfortunately, I swore. She said that if I swore again that she would remove my name from her case load.

Later that day, I managed to compose myself better and emailed my disappointment to the DEA about the interview. I then received an apology. In her correspondence, she explained that she was rather nervous. Later that day she was expecting some aggressive clients. The interview would have gone down better if she had not been apprehensive about these difficult clients.

On or around this period, I spoke to Andrea, my support worker at Prospects. She thought that for health reasons I should be on Incapacity Benefit. My DEA on the other hand, thought that I should remain sick for at least six months with a view to becoming more settled in my new home.

As my blood pressure remained high, I began to get dizzy spells and occasional headaches. Realising that the tablets that I was on at the time weren't helping me, I knew that I couldn't neglect the condition

*continued*



and risk having a stroke for example. So I went to see my doctor.

Eventually, the doctor signed me off sick with 'uncontrollable hypertension.' After about a month, I went back to him and tried to tell him that I should be signed off indefinitely. I had been advised by the NAS not to work because of my autism, for health reasons because I couldn't concentrate properly in a working environment. This time the doctor signed me off for another month.

By this time, my family knew about my circumstances and they felt that my sister Josephine should attend the next appointment with me. As she was an occupational therapist I thought it would be better if she

could explain my circumstances to the doctor in more detail. She is often in contact with doctors and has more understanding of medical and social problems.

When the appointment came, I told the doctor that Josephine was an occupational therapist and in contact with various doctors. So I allowed her to put my side of the story to him. This time, he signed me off indefinitely with 'indefinite autistic.' Following on, the DSS sent me a form to complete and then a questionnaire to follow which Andrea helped me with.

Since moving here in May 2003, I remain more settled and am extremely grateful to my sister Josephine and her husband Alan for

offering me the flat, especially as I was desperate to move away from Hackney.

I'm much happier and far more relaxed since moving here. I feel safer in Ilford living near my family. There is more entertainment here and with a short walking distance.

In conclusion, I do have some memories of Hackney that I would like to share. I shall be highlighting some of these in another issue of *Asperger United*.

*We will certainly be glad to receive positive vibes of Hackney. Most news of East London is of the wrong kind!*

*John - Editor*

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## Nottingham Asperger syndrome social group

In 1993 Anna Cohen gave this magazine its name, and its tone and nature. Since then the provision of Asperger syndrome social groups has been episodal and, like the condition, these groups can be emotive experiences as the talents and idiosyncrasies of the condition are as diverse as the effects of the condition.

The Nottingham Asperger social group formed and matured well. Most of the people attending were stable and independent. Perhaps that was the problem. Difficulties could not be dealt with: they had to be negotiated. Activities had to be planned rather than directed. The high ability of most of the group played itself out in self doubt and inner turmoil as we viewed ourselves and others in the waning light of being on the boundary of mainstream society. And yet I have been to another local social group and seen a different vista, one of confused levels and ability, less evocative and blander than the group I had known in Nottingham.

I hope another group in Nottingham emerges. A melancholy fact is even since its closure people with Aspergers still enquire if there is a group such as this. Previous group members vainly try to fuse together small gatherings of the group, or issue polemic edicts to the NAS urging another group to commence.

I remember well the last meeting of our group when we were told it would close. It was poorly attended and those who could have put forward strong arguments for its continuation were absent. We even had a few new people in the group, glad to have found the chance to socialise, only to go home perplexed and sad at its closure.

For some therefore life with Aspergers goes on, unmitigated by the chance to enjoy socialisation once a fortnight. For others it was a harsh reflection of their own difficulties. For others, myself included, it was a rare and distinct opportunity – an enriching, if disturbing, window on the world we live in. I hope the various strands, interests and ideas can once again converge and we have another group, but dryly I reflect that I doubt it.

Have any other readers got any comments about Asperger syndrome social groups. Would they encourage/deter other Asperger people from attending?

**Richard Littlewood**

*Thanks for your letter Richard. I belong to such a group in London. Whether they deter new members is up to the individual. I don't think our group does this - John*

## Film review - The Lord of the Rings

*The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* came out in December, the last of the motion picture trilogy which also included *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*. The film is based on the popular book by J. R. Tolkien. It starts in *The Hobbit*, when Bilbo steals a ring of power from the slippery Gollum. In *The Fellowship of the Ring* he gives it to his nephew Frodo who discovers that the ring is the spirit of a dark lord named Sauron !

The film has stunning special effects made at the film studios in New Zealand, including computer animated trolls and fantastic battle scenes. The characters are Aragon (Viggo Mortensen), Frodo (Elijah Wood), Gandalf (Sir Ian McKellen) the wizard, who becomes a

white wizard in *The Two Towers*, Samwise Gamgee (Sean Astin), Gimli and Legolas (John Rhys Davis and Orlando Bloom) and many more.

The New Zealand landscape is breathtaking; it really makes you believe you're in Middle Earth. Viggo Mortensen is an extremely good actor. I for one, think *The Return of the King* definitely deserved the 11 Oscars it now has under its medieval stile belt.

What is your favourite part of *The Lord of the Rings*?  
"One bit of the film to rule them all".

**Sam Reinders**

### Sexual health education programme for young people with autistic spectrum disorders

The National Autistic Society (NAS) Scotland and Caledonia Youth are developing a Sexual Health Education Programme for young people with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).

Caledonia Youth is the largest independent provider of sexual health services for young people across Scotland. It provides free, confidential support enabling young people to make informed, responsible choices about their personal and sexual relationships, so that the expression of their sexuality is a positive experience.

The programme is aimed at young people aged 13-25 with an ASD who live within travelling distance of Glasgow. Young people taking part will meet in small groups and learn about issues such as self-esteem, boundaries of relationships, communication skills, getting support, puberty, contraception, sexual behaviour and personal health.

Once the pilot programme is completed it is hoped that further programmes will take place on an ongoing basis, with groups selected to match individuals ages and ability. If you are a young person with ASD who would like to take part in one of the programmes please contact Ruth Langford at [ruthlangford@nas.org.uk](mailto:ruthlangford@nas.org.uk) or Dawn Larman at [dawnlarman@nas.org.uk](mailto:dawnlarman@nas.org.uk) or phone them on 0141 221 8090.

### Social group for people with Asperger syndrome in Dundee

A social group for people with Aspergers syndrome (AS) is being set up through The National Autistic Society Scotland up in Dundee.

A steering group of young people, adults with Asperger syndrome and other interested people will meet to plan the group.

It is anticipated that the group will be a place for people with AS to meet others in a non-threatening environment and that activities and outings will be planned, perhaps along with arranging speakers, fundraising and awareness raising activities.

The group will be assisted by volunteers and an NAS staff member, but will be based upon what those involved want from the group. The steering group is already active and it is hoped that the social group will start in the spring.

If you want to take part in the group once it starts or be involved in the steering group and you live in or around Dundee, are aged over 16, with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome or high functioning autism, please contact Dawn Larman at [dawnlarman@nas.org.uk](mailto:dawnlarman@nas.org.uk) or telephone her on: 0141 221 8090.



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