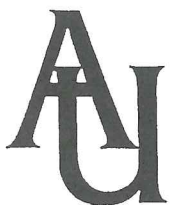
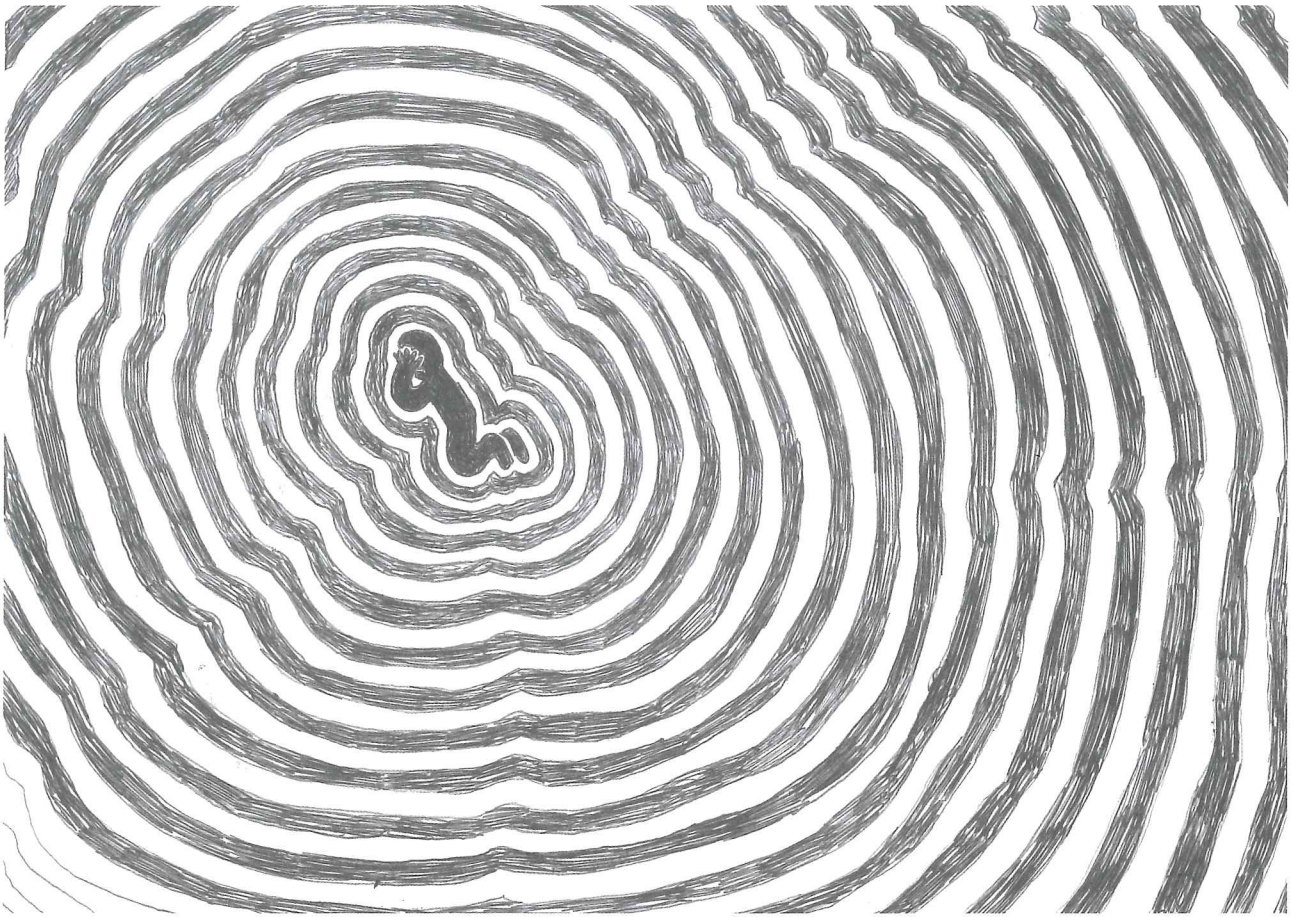


Produced by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions

Asperger *united*

Edition **59** July 2009





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

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

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

Editor John Joyce

Additional support The National Autistic Society's Publications Department

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

Thank you to George Cox who kindly produced the illustration included here and on page 6, and 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
17 August '09

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 the July edition of your paper.

Thank you for the high-quality presentations.

Hope you all enjoy the summer whatever the vagaries of the weather. I do not expect the country to be drowned as a result of the declining Arctic ice cap just yet!

As I write I am attempting to lose weight but not getting very far; no fad diet, just eating less and exercising!

As usual I will get to Lourdes this year and report on it in my swansong edition.

May I thank you, whether a new arrival or one who has contributed since 1997 or earlier, for your articles and other presentations. Please keep it up with my successor.

God bless you all.

Your editor

John Joyce

If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for October will be **mental health**. If you have any ideas for future themes, please let us know them. Writing on any subject is still welcome, so get writing! Art is also welcome.

the work edition

OCD awareness by Colm cover
see Colm's letter on page 13

Editorial and contents 3

Job rant 4-5
feature by Jaimes

Letters to the Editor 6

Pen pals 7-9

Book review by the Goth 9
Travels with my teddy bear
by Debra Schiman

Notice about a new women's group 9
from Emily, Birmingham

Introduction on AS and employment 10-11
article by James

Hello Kitty has Asperger's 11
article by Alice

Notice on the Christmas card competition.. 11

Workplaces 12
article by Tom

Heather 13
poem by Dan

Letter from Colm about his life 13

Work 14
article by Ruth

Book review by the Goth 15
Autistics' guide to dating
by Emilia Murry Ramey and
Jody John Ramey

Notice: special offer on the above book. . . 15

Letter from George about TV screens 15

Notices about the Autism Action Network. . 16
and Investing in brighter futures

Job rant

by Jaimes

Recently I spoke to two fellow Aspies about the lack of provisions we are facing when finding work. The subject of employment agencies inevitably arose and I've heard that others have expressed similar reservations.

Admittedly some issues are born out of the fact that Asperger's is still a relatively new discovery . . . but obviously ultimately we are the only ones who can change such issues via a concerted effort to re-educate the system. This is the main reason I am producing this document . . . coupled with the fact I have my own reservations.

Initially I was quite content with the service I received and found the personal development programme, self-advocacy, etc. beneficial, not to mention the fact I was finally meeting people with similar diagnoses to myself.

However my reservations began towards the end of phase-2 job searching. At the time I had been unemployed for two years and never worked longer than five months. . . . My last two jobs had been permanent — at the first, issues were raised about my concentration; but this was a year before my diagnosis.

I left due to the anti-social hours and started a job as a waiter. At first I muddled some orders up but the second week I'd improved greatly and was also working on the till. Then one day it got very busy, yet due to poor management I was left virtually alone for two hours. Even when I asked the 19-year-old (!) manager for extra help he merely said I've seen it busier and basically told me to get on with it. Then he had the nerve to send me home saying he didn't think I was coping.

I was asked back a few days later and found out that in truth I'd come a cropper because of my presentation. They wanted me

to repeat a script parrot-fashion saying welcome, sir, blah blah, three bags full, etc. and just because I didn't want to convey myself as a robotic cyborg I altered it slightly, keeping it short and to the point, minus the pomp.

The site manager had informed everyone that the operations manager was visiting today. However, since I'd never met him, it was pointless him saying anything. Apparently the Op wasn't pleased with the way I'd greeted him . . . I'd obviously been so snowed under that I'd given priority to serving. Anyway, this was apparently enough to sack me.

It was the first time I'd been sacked and on the way home I didn't know whether to laugh or cry but it soon sunk in and wouldn't let go. The next four months I was greatly depressed and confused for much of the time but sought solace in the guitar and taught myself to play properly. Talk of AS had been skirted around up till now by my mum but even now I agreed something had to change and that it was no longer bad luck. This was precipitated by going to see my local psychologist again and getting diagnosed several months later. Fortunately I was diagnosed by a pioneering researcher I trusted; I may have had my doubts had it been someone else.

How this relates to employment agencies: in light of such events and temporary jobs, coupled with the fact that I'd only enjoyed being a postman out of my fifteen-or-so jobs, I agreed with my employment consultant that all these jobs should be avoided if possible (I assumed including a work-experience placement) and that I should focus on jobs that would hold my interest, such as something in a trainee social/psychiatric capacity, because that's what I was in my second year studying. Aside from this perhaps working with cats or in a music shop, since music is my main passion.

But, as time was running out, my consultant put the heat on me, saying that I had to find something quickly in order to fulfil my and their obligations. So she called a superstore largely, as far as I could make out, because they'd helped out before. So it seemed that all that had been discussed was suddenly thwarted. Feeling that I had little if any choice, as I'd signed the forms etc., I went along with this even though it was an environment that I should've avoided and didn't need experience in. I then ended up getting very aggravated and leaving the placement early to work at a warehouse out of sheer need for money, as well as the disillusionment directly caused by the agency. People with AS can lack foresight — however, I feel that I was largely forced into the situation and, after all, Christmas was coming up and I wanted to be able to splash out on people for once in my life.

I'm not alone here as other people have complained that all agencies seem to do is stick you in some mundane job just because it's "experience" . . . yet they've failed to take into account that many of us like myself don't need such experience, we merely need independence and financial security — the same as anyone.

Whilst it is true that less than 20% of the autistic spectrum are employed, this doesn't excuse placing us in such situations . . . as I'm sure most of you know though, many of us say that a proper job would improve our lives more than anything else.

I received support from the agency during my trial period but two-and-a-half months into the job my employer, out of the blue, had a grievance with me. However, they conveniently forgot to call the agency, thus infuriating me to the point I could've swung for someone. . . . Two weeks later I was a goner but their misconduct had riled me more than the sacking as I thought: here I am getting support and it's still getting messed up.

Another bone of contention is that I had recently changed employment consultants after only just building up a rapport with my old one, thus there was no point of reference. I then had a further two consultants whilst I worked there, which I feel didn't help matters for me or my employer as continuity was broken. . . . My first consultant accompanied me to the interview but at the time of my sacking had left. . . . People with AS can find it harder when there's a break in continuity.

My friend (Aspie) shed more light on this, telling me how agencies have to get people off so that the Dept of Work and Pensions saves money, even if that means putting neurodiverse people back into the mill. I realised there'd been more than met the eye and this was confirmed recently when my DEA suggested other options due to an apparent lack of funds.

In my mind, my prospects are currently at an all time low, yet again because of their incompetence. I'm not bitter; if I was I wouldn't be writing this, coz it's about making changes, not merely self-pity. I was disappointed though, after all I waited seven months before I could start phase 1. I expected something better

This isn't about back-stabbing or personal vendettas, just an attempt to correct underlying issues for people in a similar boat to myself.

Notes: job certainty in general is left wanting for the AS community. If there aren't any guarantees and people don't get anywhere with support, what is left? Certainly not (for me and most) employment benefits as that implies one is fit/capable of job-searching

Also after eight years of trying umpteen jobs, wouldn't one think that if there was something suitable out there I would've found it by now? DEA should be aware of this, after all I've tried all the manual slave labour stuff and it doesn't work. The only alternative I can see right now is voluntary work.

letters to the editor

Dear John Joyce,

I do not know you personally, but your editorship has made a difference to my life. Reading about the many things you do, and how you travel extensively despite your condition is inspiring. Also, I was giving up on my degree, but your talking about your own helped me to continue — with success!

I am now 55 and I was diagnosed 4-5 years ago. Since then, I have been “learning” how Asperger’s affects me and it has reduced my anxiety considerably. Reading “*Asperger Times*” makes me feel less isolated, less “strange”, yet gives me pride that I am “different”. I am learning to use this knowledge to enhance my life.

So, thank you from a newcomer for your hard work, which is greatly appreciated. I wish you every success in your future. You never know how many lives you touch, without even knowing it!

best regards

Marianne

Dear *Asperger United*,

I thought I would tell you briefly of my sad experience of being in a church, wanting to use my spiritual gifts. I feel constantly excluded. They are constantly twisting the rules so I can’t do things or fit in their mould. I have epilepsy as well as Asperger syndrome, so all this causes me great stress at times.

Does anyone else have experience, good or bad, of being part of the church? Maybe you could write and let me know your experience and we could help each other,

from

Sue

Lapses

Such a long time I have had these. People have said I am “blanking” them, ignoring them. Epilepsy is ruled out, however I also have ME diagnosed last year. When lapses happen I am very unresponsive like I have turned into a statue. I have complete loss of all senses and conscious thought. Often it takes me longer to come round, get back to myself. More than the lapses, conversation is very affected. I feel lapses have nothing to do with epilepsy.

Mark

Thanks for the latest edition of *AU*: the bit about absences was very relevant — something I’ve covered up over many years until talking it through with my GP (without mentioning Asperger’s though he has the diagnosis in my notes). He said it was stress-related and not to be concerned that it might be something more. Since increasing the antidepressants they’ve almost gone. I’ve decided to leave my full-time job where they won’t let me work part-time, which I think would relieve a lot of the stress and give me time to do more creative things as opposed to using free time to recover from work. I have decided to find out if having little money but lots of time to be creative is better. I always suspected I would drop out of the system sooner or later — I work in the NHS and have become increasingly institutionalised.

Along with the increased stress has been not being able to listen to music while I work as I used to — the music that was energy-giving turned into extra stimulus that overloaded me.

Many thanks

S



How to reply to Pen Pals

- Please remember to let us know the name and number of the person whom your letter is for. (All pen pals are numbered.)
- To contact a pen pal, please send your letter to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.
- We will pass your letter on to the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.
- Please note that all pen-pal letters sent via *Asperger United* are opened before being passed on.
- Those under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen-pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.
- If you prefer, you could try the NAS pen-pal website, which is at www.assists.org.uk/penpal.html Please note that ASSIST (which runs the website) is entirely separate from *Asperger United*.

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

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

Pen pal number 52

Hello, my name is Daniel and I am 16. I have Asperger's syndrome and it affects me in lots of ways. I am coming to the end of my time at school and hope to go to college. I am greatly into cricket and football and support Birmingham City. I also like playing on my playstation, mostly cricket and football games. I also like playing cricket and bouncing a ball about. I live with my mom and dad and my 11-year-old sister. Life with her can be a pain at times. I would love to hear from anyone who would like a pen pal who has similar interests to me.

Pen pal number 53

My name is David and I have very late diagnosis of AS. I live in Sheffield and would be glad to meet others. I receive virtually no help with my condition, if it has been correctly diagnosed. My main interests are guitar, philosophy, walking, travelling and socialising.

I am new to *Asperger United*. In the current edition, was interested in the article by Vincent: he writes of "neurological

variation" and then later of "psychological condition". There seems to be much confusion whether AS is genuinely neurological or genuinely psychological. "Restricted, repetitive, pedantic and stereotyped activities, interests, speech and routines" in the article could be true of half the people I meet. It does not have to be specifically autistic.

Would be glad to hear from Amber or others in Yorkshire/North Midlands/ Manchester.

Pen pal number 54

Hi there,

my name is Sean, I'm 24 years old, and have been diagnosed with Asperger's/high-functioning autism when was 15.

I have a few hobbies that include the "herp" hobby, which involves reptiles, which is new to me. So far it's going well, and I also played the electric guitar. I like listening to rock music like AC/DC and Guns'n'Roses, to name a few, and I also enjoy a little gardening now and then. And I'm looking for a friend! Via e-mail or snail mail, and I currently live in Scotland with my parents and siblings.

My time at school was not the best either, but I still tend to struggle with any sort of written work to this day, math or English, or anything for that matter, but the hard graft side of things went really well, especially when I was at college doing an introduction to hard/soft landscaping a few years back. Again I struggled with the written side of it, I didn't really make any friends in the end.

So if there is anyone who has had a similar experience at school or at college, or with work placements and had difficulty, who wishes to talk about it, or anything of a similar nature, I would be more than happy to receive a reply of any sort, and hope to write or type to someone with a similar background or interests soon. Thanks again!

Pen pal number 55

My name is Rhod, I suffer from Asperger's (mild) and mental impairment. I like sci-fi, horror, reading and writing, watching good DVDs or videos, doing business, writing to friends, even pen pals, possibly meeting up in the future.

Pen pal number 56

Hello, my name is Thomas. I am 12 years of age, I am (somewhere) on the autism spectrum. I live in Worcestershire and I'm interested in hearing from anybody aged from 10-17.

I'm interested in birdwatching, especially falcons, and I never stop playing on my Playstation (I have a PS3 if anyone wants to talk to me on Playstation network). I like a wide variety of music from classical to Slipknot. I like animals, I love my pet rabbit, Lulu, and my dog, Zack. I would quite like to work with animals when I am older.

I just want a friend that has similar interests that I do and we could communicate and get to know each other.

Pen pal number 57

Hi, my name is Richard. I'm a 27-year-old gay man looking for other men and women who are gay and Asperger, as I would like someone to relate to, meet, and talk about the problem. With being homosexual and having Asperger's syndrome, can't talk to my other Asperger friends about me being gay as they wouldn't understand. It would be nice to talk to other gay Asperger people about being gay and being on autistic spectrum — get quite down about being different to others and be nice to be friends with people similar to me.

Pen pal number 58

Richard, 35, South-West Scotland. High-functioning Asperger syndrome. Late diagnosis in 2007. Interests: walking, computers and computing, plus history. Just started college full-time. Like to hear from others with high-functioning Asperger syndrome.

Pen pal number 59

My name is Jack. I am 28 and have Asperger's syndrome, diagnosed when I was four. I live in Malton, near York, and I would like to expand my social network. I am interested in classical music. I can play the piano (quite well) and church organ and a bit of guitar. I also like architecture, especially churches, and enjoy things like swimming, bicycling and travelling (everywhere), ideally by train. My main interest is steam trains; this is most likely due to speed, power, safety and excitement. I even enjoy conversations with people, but sometimes I find it easier conversing with women than men. I want to share my interests with another person of a similar age to me who lives in North Yorkshire.

Pen pal number 60

Hello my name is Liam and I am 15 years old. I live with my mum and dad and I have a brother and a sister.

I like football and my favourite team is Manchester United, and my favourite players are Ronaldo and Rooney. I go to the sports centre every Saturday with my friends to play. Do you like playing football?

I have an Xbox 360 which I like to play: the games I play: Fifa 09, Quantum of Solace and Halo 3.

I also have a laptop which I like to spend time on.

I would like to hear from anyone who has the same interests.

Travels with my teddy bear

by **Debra Schiman**

Pen Press £9.99

ISBN: 978 1 906206 92 5

review by **the Goth**

Oh no, I thought, yet another autobiography, and sure enough this book is written in the direct simple prose style which is quite common in people on the spectrum. But a few pages in my view had been changed dramatically. This is a wonderful book for dipping into, as almost every paragraph can be read as an individual anecdote, while at the same time the narrative flows smoothly from paragraph to paragraph.

Best of all, the author's engaging personality, intelligence and wit are clearly shown in her choice of words. Rather suitably, as the book is about a grown woman and her talking teddy bear, reading the book got me some strange looks on the train, especially when I had a stupid grin on my face. She is also not someone to beat around the bush, which is fortunate, as one of the funniest stories she tells concerns having learnt the Italian for "you have a very small penis" for dealing with troublesome Italian men.

Hi, I'm setting up a women-only group in Birmingham for women with Asperger's/ ASD. It's going to meet the third Wednesday of every month, 6.30-8.30 pm at:

Journey Metropolitan Community Church
17 Shaws Passage
Birmingham.

If you want more information please email/phone me **womens_aspie_group@yahoo.co.uk**
07745 039 326.

Emily

James's introduction on AS and employment

I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at 17, in 1993, and it was an answer as to why I had developed differently to others of my age. I suppose, originally, my mother "diagnosed" me, in her own way, when I was a baby.

It is very hard for people with AS to find and retain employment, due to their sensory, communication and thought processes being at odds with other people. I am no exception and experienced victimisation while I was at work. When I graduated from university I thought that I could find employment which could afford me a good standard of living and be commensurate with my graduate status. Soon after my graduation I got a menial job and the salary did not reflect the level of responsibility. I had been promised representation from the employment services: someone should have visited me, but in five years of work, no-one came to see me. I was a proofreader at a newspaper — this did give me money, but I wanted some job satisfaction.

After a year or so, I had inadvertently crossed one or two of my colleagues, one of whom was another proofreader. The first instance I recall was when a female colleague was asking him where such-and-such a person was. He said that he did not know where this individual was, but I volunteered to tell her about the other's possible location. My counterpart was cross about this and retorted "Hey, you; butt out! Don't be rude!" I was taken aback by this and apologised, but he did not let me away with this and said "Still rude, though". This was not the only clash I was to have with this man. Upon reflection, having talked about this with my dad, I had come between him and the young lady.

While there, I needed to have an operation on my sinus. One day, my manager called me into his office and made reference to my hygiene. He told me that colleagues had complained about the fact that the bleeding

made me smell. I explained the problem and that I was on a waiting list. I was later placed in the embarrassing position of having to write an apology because the condition made me smell. I suggested, in the letter, that he had two options: to allow me to take sick leave or allow me some time to go and have my sinus attended to. He agreed to the latter. Imagine that; having to apologise for bleeding!

I was off work for five months, during which time my mother died. Upon my return to work, I worked on the night shift, as my youngest brother was still at school and I felt a responsibility to be in the house if he was ever brought home sick. It was during these first weeks back that I had to deal with more of my colleague's pettiness. He was rechecking my work when he started on the daytime shift and complained to the manager if there was anything left unfinished. Once he even rubbished my efforts. When I found this, I was livid. I remember having to purse my lips, to prevent myself from screaming.

My colleague told the manager that I had spent most of my shift reading family notices. He accused me of not doing enough work, when in fact I was attending to all the things I needed to check. My dad telephoned my manager and explained my position, so it was suggested that time sheets be kept, to see how long my duties took, plus any interruptions to check on more pressing work. After a few weeks it was agreed I was doing my fair share. My dad also said I completed my BMDs (Births, Marriages and Deaths) by 10pm and read other advertisements until 4am. He asked who was being credited for this work? It was the man who said I was only reading BMDs. My manager had to admit that he acted in haste, by accusing me of not doing my job, based on the rantings of a disgruntled colleague.

On another occasion, the man reported me for work that he thought I had neglected to do.

I left a courtesy note, once, for my counterpart after an IT problem, which was returned in the manager's handwriting, telling me my efforts were not good enough. I wondered at how insensitive a person could be, especially when my mother had only been dead a couple of months. I felt like resigning, but I was advised to stay. I was asked to not agitate this man further, because he was "an old man". He was a year from retirement at the time.

During my years there I worked solidly and to the best of my ability. My attention to detail, however, sometimes gave my manager doubts about my work, but I gave the best job that I could give. Anything less would have upset me. The manager thought I was taking too long to read over the obituaries. I was only following the company's rules of presentation. Eventually, it was admitted that I was doing a really good job!

These years were not all doom and gloom, however. I made a few good friends and I still think about them, because they worked hard and they always tried to break the monotony with a few laughs. They were also very kind to me when my mother died. They held a collection to buy flowers. In return, I would buy chocolates for them at Christmas.

I left my job as there were no opportunities for progression and it was not a challenge. I did not spend three years studying law and international relations at university, only to do shift work. I needed a new challenge and I certainly needed a change of scene.

In conclusion, I would like to state that in the world of work, Aspergers who have found employment have not always been able to obtain it and hold on to it for a number of reasons, some of which I had experienced. I believe that more still needs to be done to help Aspergers find and maintain jobs that are within and not below their level of capability and I wish to further assert that Aspergers can be great assets to employers, because they work to a very high standard.

Hello Kitty has Asperger's

by Alice

I have read that people with Asperger's syndrome (of which I am one) often have "immaturity of general appearance and unusual symmetry of face" to quote from "Autistic spectrum disorders: an aid to diagnosis" issued by the NAS. What I am asking is: is this a bad thing? I'm only 18 at the moment but surely juvenile appearance will come in handy for older Aspies? And symmetry of the face? When has that not been a bonus? It is, after all, what makes *hello Kitty* such a phenomenal success. "Kawaii" meaning "cute" is a Japanese obsession and all these characters that are so adored have "unusual symmetry of face". I personally have often been referred to as having a "cute" face but who's complaining? I think this is one of the many bonuses of being an Aspy.

2009 Asperger United Christmas card competition

Many thanks to all those people who sent their designs to us. We were very impressed with the range of designs.

Our winner is a beautiful Partridge in a pear tree design. We loved it! It's by Eleni, who is 51, has AS and lives in Norfolk.

In the face of some hard opposition, Eleni won the prize of £75, plus a few packs of the cards to send to her friends and family.

Eleni's Partridge will be available in a twin pack with a lovely Smiley Santa design by Peter Myers. These cards will be available to buy in the autumn and we'll be sending a catalogue with these and the other attractive NAS Christmas cards to *AU* readers with the October issue.

Workplaces

by Tom

For those able to go to university, the possibility of postgraduate study leading to a university career is perceived as a way of avoiding the intimidating office environment. This is a long journey to undertake in the hope that a cloistered research or lecturing post will avoid all the difficulties found in more typical work environments. However, such cloistered ideals are hard to find nowadays.

I worked twelve years in industry, on project teams, and the last seventeen years as a lecturer. I have also worked in those truly awful *The Office*-style environments. In retrospect the industry project teams were much easier to fit into than university. What I found working on project teams was that, because I had some valued skills to offer, people were much more accommodating when it came to fitting in and my way of doing things. I find I need clarification a lot, because I don't pick up all the information I should. Work colleagues didn't seem to mind.

At university there seems to be a lot of rivalry and mistrust among colleagues. Even though you are working fairly independently, other academics worry that you aren't pulling your weight and giving them more work, or are doing things differently. There is also a culture of competitive banter. So as someone who didn't gel well with the group, didn't seem to be listening properly and was socially clumsy, distrust grew and for many years it was as bad as *The Office*. Above all, my need for clarification was picked up as a sign of weakness and an instruction went round that I was not to be helped. My first six years as a lecturer were the worst of my whole career, although gradually I found ways of coping, and eventually making my diagnosis known to managers, was able to find some resolution.

That was a tough discovery, given the long road to finding work in a university. I had

learning difficulties at school, constant bullying, and left school at 18 woefully under-qualified to struggle through the usual pattern of short and difficult jobs interspersed with periods out of work and fruitless interviews. I went to college at 20, found things much easier, obtained my first degree (in Geography) at 25 and a PhD at 30.

Having strong visual analysis skills, in the days before computers were able to take on these tasks, I was able to find a career in industry as a systems engineer, working with display technology. Having desirable skills in such an environment seemed to override having any kind of disability. People are much more accommodating and supportive than in any other environment I've worked in. Also, I was good at researching all kinds of topics, which is always a useful skill to have.

While some environments are bound to be difficult, it is worth looking for jobs where the skills you can offer may help to outweigh the difficulties. Perhaps some investigative research is needed on work environments that are Asperger-friendly. My experience of university as a workplace seems fairly typical. This is ironic as universities are trying hard to accommodate and support students with Asperger's syndrome. That said, I do enjoy teaching and the opportunities to research independently. It is just that that kind of independence creates a culture more like *The Office* than many would imagine.

Those seeking what may seem an ideal career in a cloistered university environment need to find out, before they commit years to postgraduate study, whether this ideal is attainable. Of course things may change in the next few years, but there are increasing pressures on academic staff that are steadily undermining what, if anything, remains of that cloistered idyll.

Heather

by Dan

I looked across a crowded room
I saw you
You smiled so perfectly
You captured a moment of beauty
I didn't have a camera
But I had my mind
Plus my heart
I captured you
I play back that smile in my mind
Sit back on my cushioned heart
I fall to sleep
But not apart
Because you are joined to me
I captured a moment of beauty

Dear Asperger United,

I see the whole world through and through which to me is quite automatic but also quite systematically “unnatural” in a way I prefer it not to be. I have spent a long twenty-six years of my life here in this whole district land known as “Northern Ireland” which to me is the only land of many wonders. I have spent most of my existence trying to tackle so many things all at one go without any reason or thought to it. My own bodily strength of desires asks me if should I stay or should I go to prevent any worse thoughts from streaming in so much and so immensively from inside my own mind. I have even had to look through all the so-called notifications of all the so-called “deep troubles” and many sorrows which there is no escape from. Other people, and especially the average, seem to want to contradict all my personal thoughts and feelings and gestures, particularly those from within me, without even perhaps any need for

it. I see that my life isn't just what it seems at all, unless the world would be a lot duller. Some people, to the best of my own greater and whole advantage, only just see me more or less just like seeing me as a kind of ideal whole living vegetable, not even giving a cold shoulder to cry on and such, as they say when the beat just goes on and on, without the whole knowing of many things to come, which perhaps isn't saying much at all from where I come from is a whole different type of stereotypical matter. I just hope some people would at least try and understand quite specifically where I do come from, to try and make them want to believe how much of a great hard life I come from and perhaps some day they might just understand for themselves what it really feels like to me, just like in the old saying of the title from the recent X-Files movie, as the proverb has to be: “I want to believe”.

Colm, this issue's cover artist

Work

by Ruth

It feels odd to have “work” as the subject for a publication received by a group of people with a very high unemployment rate, so with that in mind I thought to share my unusual situation with regard to employment.

I’m 35 and have been on disability benefit since I was 19. However that doesn’t mean I do nothing:

For two and a half years I have been living in one of a series of small valley towns in the south Pennines (West Yorkshire). When I first moved here it was to live in a Buddhist community, so for over a year I was mostly quite isolated from the local community. When the Buddhist community closed I was left with very little in terms of a life.

A few months later I moved to a nearby farmhouse, where I am a lodger, and started volunteering in a charity shop two valleys over. Working two mornings a week was something, but not enough, and I was frequently very distressed and tearful, feeling useless, inadequate and very disabled. I was

applying for various voluntary work when I had the motivation and will power but having little luck. This went on for about a year.

And then, all at once, several offers of constructive activity came my way. One was a voluntary position I’d applied for some months before. Another was to formalise some work I was doing on and off for a friend who has an ethical fashion business — I iron for them and do odd bits like help with mail-outs. And a third was a friend of a friend who is writing a book and needs someone to help with some photocopying and scanning for his website and other admin needs.

The new voluntary position hasn’t worked out as the environment was noisy and the organisation, um, chaotic, but I’m still left with quite a bit to do at home, which suits me well. I can do it in my own time and unobserved, in the quiet or with classical music playing.

I am happy to be gaining a reputation as an accurate, precise worker who delights

in “boring” jobs, and is reliable and honest.

In order to get out and about a bit I take a weekly Yoga class and attend the local choral society practice sessions.

I also help my landlady a bit with sheep and other animals, and am getting my own alpacas to guard the sheep from foxes during lambing.

Really I wanted to share this to show that, although quite disabled, a person can find appropriate employment to fulfil the human needs to be useful and occupied, appreciated and capable. In the wrong environments I’m disabled and no use to anyone, but in the right settings I am happy and productive.

I believe that living semi-rurally in small communities might give some autistics more opportunities than living in large towns and cities, despite it might appear otherwise, because there is more opportunity to be known locally and make a reputation for what we are good at.

Autistics' guide to dating

**a book by Autistics, for Autistics and those
who love them or who are in love with them**

by **Emilia Murry Ramey and
Jody John Ramey**

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

£11.99 / \$16.95

ISBN: 978 1 84310 881 8

review by **the Goth**

There is a moment of trepidation when I start reading another self-help book, because it is so hard to say things that are of practical use — dating is a very large subject and no book is so big that it could be enough to cover even one per cent. However, this recently married couple of autistics has created a useful contribution to the subject. Without dwelling too much on their personal experiences, they look at every aspect of the dating process from where to go where you might meet someone to tips on how to keep a relationship going. They also choose to define “Autistic” with a capital A, meaning something more all-encompassing than usual.

They are both messianic Catholics, and their belief that everything you do should be legal, ethical, and moral is repeated throughout the book, but don't let this put you off: their descriptions of relationships are tolerant and broad-minded.

Dear AU,

I was wondering if any other *AU* readers experience problems with the widespread use of flat-screen technology in public spaces. Around one in five people with Asperger's has increased sensitivities to visual stimuli.

I find that the quality and brightness of image provided by these new screens is much more likely to cause pain and distress than old-style screens. Added to this is the fact that, by virtue of their thinness, these screens can be set up in places that in the past would have been free of TVs. An increasing number of supermarkets, convenience stores and high-street shops have flat-screens either in their windows or, most unhelpfully, at their tills. London Underground has introduced these screens along the stairways of some stations and there are enormous ones on platforms.

It is understandable that TV shops need to have screens in their windows but in other places the placing of these screens just seems gratuitous — a lot of the time no actual information is being communicated on them and most NT people ignore them. The problem is exacerbated by the ease of availability of hi-tech graphics software, which allows quite strange, flashing images to be displayed.

It seems that our public space is increasingly becoming colonised by this technology, making it more difficult for autistic people to participate in society.

George

The book reviewed above is available from Central Books Ltd, the book distributor for the NAS, tel: **0845 458 9911**, on line at **www.autism.org.uk/pubs** and can be ordered from all good bookshops. **Special offer:** readers can get copies of this

book post-free until 31 August 2009. Just send your order with a cheque made payable to
The NAS
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG

The Autism Action Network

Are you a member of a group of adults with autism who want to represent the views and interests of people with autism in your area?

This year, the National Autistic Society is launching a new project called the Autism Action Network. The project will enable local autism support groups to campaign on behalf of their members and other people affected by autism in their area. And we are looking for a group of adults with autism to take part.

Groups taking part in the project will get training and support from NAS staff at every stage of your campaign. You will have access to a wide range of resources to help you with your campaign, including a web forum where you will be able to share tips and advice with other campaigners taking part in the project. We will also give you financial support with administration expenses and other costs associated with running your campaign.

Your campaign will run for 12-18 months and at the end of the campaign you will be

expert campaigners, fully equipped with the skills you need to achieve lasting change for people affected by autism in your area. You will also have produced your very own set of campaign resources, which we will publish so that other campaigners can learn from your experiences.

If you would like to find out more about the Autism Action Network and become one of our first expert campaign groups, please contact the NAS Campaigns team. You can call **020 7923 5799**, email **campaign@nas.org.uk** or write to: The Campaigns Team, The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG.

Initially, only local groups in England will be able to take part in the Autism Action Network. But if you live in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, please do get in touch with us anyway. We may still be able to offer you support with your local campaign. We also plan to extend the Autism Action Network to groups across the UK in future.

Investing in Brighter Futures

support programme

The National Autistic Society (NAS) is working with the Bankers Benevolent Fund to run a programme called "Investing in Brighter Futures". The programme gives access to NAS support services to parents of children with autism, or people with autism themselves, who are working or who have previously worked in the banking industry. Needs are assessed on an individual basis but every

applicant will receive life membership of the NAS. Support for adults, available through the programme, includes access to social groups, employment support and welfare rights support. For more information, or to check whether you might be eligible for support through this programme, please visit **www.autism.org.uk/bbf** or call **020 7903 3587**.



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