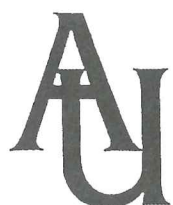
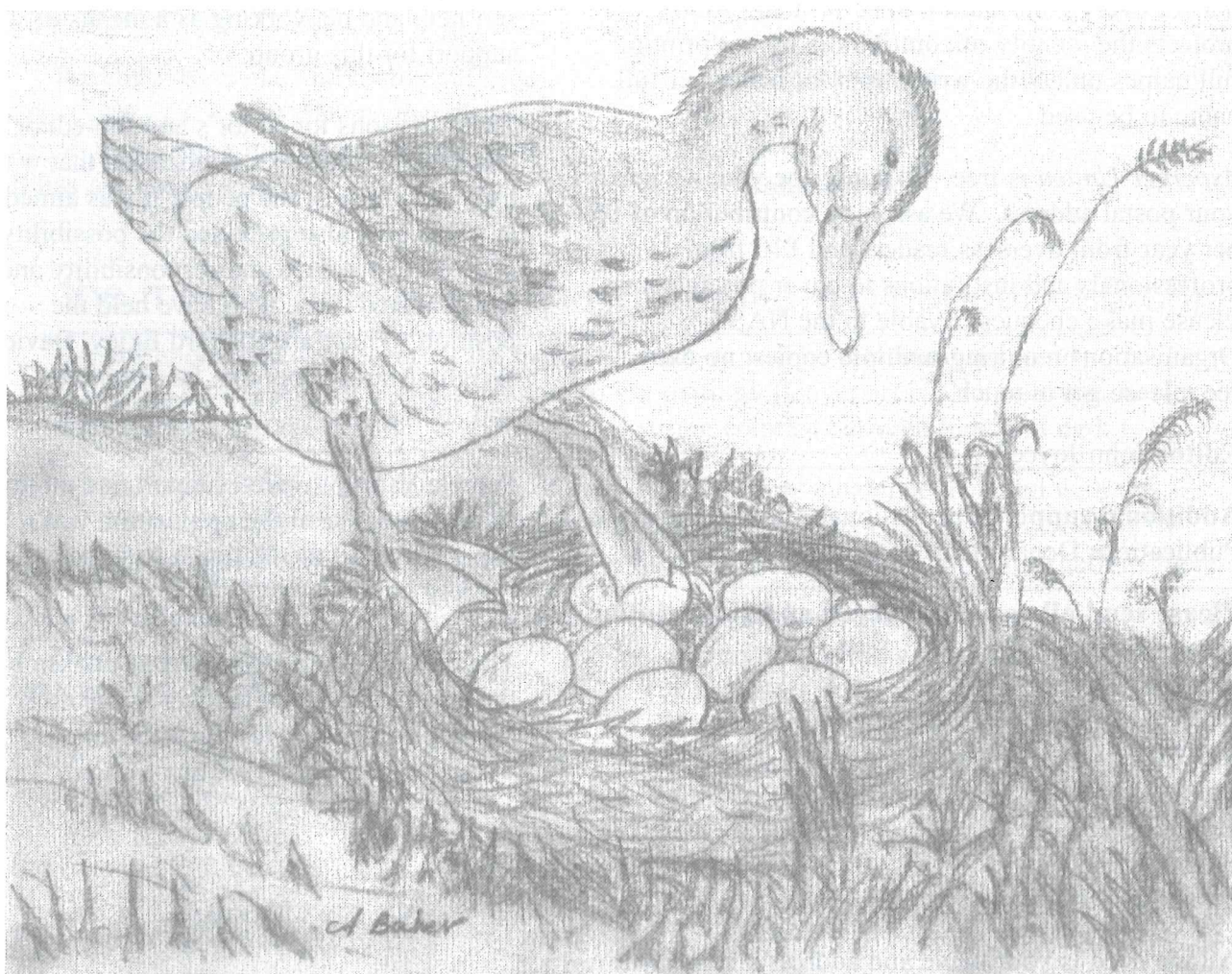


Produced by and for people with autism-spectrum conditions

Asperger *united*

Edition 60 October 2009





Asperger United is a magazine run by and for adults with autism-spectrum conditions (although some parents subscribe on behalf of their under-sixteens). 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

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 3595
Fax: 020 7833 9666
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.

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
9 November '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 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,

Hope all is well with you all and you are enjoying your summer whether or no you have had a holiday. This weekend I shall travel to Lourdes for a week (Aug 21-28).

As I am about to take my final bow as your editor I hope your content will continue to be as good under my successor, the Goth.

Recently my home and family suffered upheavals. The house was manhandled in the cause of replacing the central heating system. It has not recovered yet.

Though I will not be your editor you may not escape seeing my name in print in future editions; I may make the odd contribution.

May I thank the long-established readers for tolerating my editorials since 1997 and more recent arrivals for their patience over the years.

Your departing editor,

John Joyce

the mental health edition (with quite a bit about church)

If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for January will be **relationships** of all sorts. Writing on any subject is still welcome, so get writing! (Cover art is also welcome, but please note that the printing process requires strong contrast between light and dark.)

Individual subscribers should find a copy of the NAS Christmas catalogue included with this issue. Instructions for ordering are printed in the catalogue, or orders can be placed online by going to www.autism.org.uk clicking on "our online shops" and following the instructions there.

<i>Duck</i> by A Baker	cover	Book review by the Goth	12
Editorial and contents	3	<i>Asperger syndrome — a love story</i>	
<i>Church</i>	4, 5 & 9	by Sarah Hendrickx and Keith Newton	
feature: responses to Sue's letter		<i>The Asperger couple's workbook</i>	
Letter to the Editor	6	by Maxine Aston	
Pen pals	7 & 8	<i>Counselling for Asperger couples</i>	
<i>Dumbed expression, stress compression</i>	8	by Barrie Thompson	
poem by Richard		Notice: special offer on books	12
Letter about mental health from Neil . . .	10-11	Letter about life by Michelle	13
Book review by Neil	11	<i>In reponse to your request</i>	14
<i>Mental health aspects of autism and</i>		article by Andy	
<i>Asperger syndrome</i>		<i>Employee training courses</i>	14
by Mohammad Ghaziuddin		notice from Prospects	
		<i>Your opinion wanted</i>	15
		notice from the incoming editor	
		<i>Debatewise debating website</i>	16
		advert by Dave	

Dear Asperger United

In response to Sue's letter in *Asperger United* I can identify with her feelings of being excluded and undervalued by her church. I have been a churchgoer all my life (52 years), although I didn't become a Christian until I was 19. It was only four years ago that I was diagnosed with Asperger's. Before that, many people judged me as rude, emotionally unstable and unspiritual. My father and brother (probably both undiagnosed Asperger's) have also felt undervalued and unappreciated by churches they have worked hard to serve.

On the positive side I must say that I have generally found Christians to be much more welcoming and accepting of me than people outside the church and for many years the Christian community was the only place where I could find friends. Fifteen years ago, however, I was refused membership of a church because they had received a report from my previous church saying that I had upset a number of people and clashed with those in authority. (I was still welcome to attend the church services, but was not allowed to go to church business meetings as they thought I would be disruptive.) The decision was reversed six months later when the leaders saw how hard I was trying to mend my ways, but it was the most humiliating experience of my life, even more than my stay in a psychiatric clinic when I was 18. I don't blame the church leaders, since there was no way they could have known about my Asperger's and in any case there was an arrogance in me that did need correction. Like Darcy of *Pride and prejudice* (who clearly had Asperger's) my pride was well and truly broken, helping me to emerge as a better person.

My current church is particularly welcoming to people who are disabled, which is why I moved there six years ago, as I have two adopted sons with Down's syndrome. I had no hesitation in "coming out Asperger" at

church after my diagnosis and had a very positive response.

I have written about my life, including my various experiences of churches, in my book *Not your normal family* under the pen name of Fiona Barrington. It is one of the books sold by the NAS, or it can be ordered through bookshops or amazon.co.uk.

Fiona

Dear Sue,

I have seen your letter in the July 2009 Asperger United paper talking about church. I am a Christian and have had/have experience of church/Christians. I have also heard all sorts of things which aren't necessarily true.

Basically my experience of church has been fairly good. I am speaking as someone who has mental health/Asperger syndrome. There have been people who don't understand me that well. Also, as mentioned above, I heard directly/indirectly of people with mental health issues not being treated properly/appropriately by churches.

But there seems to be challenges/differences of belief for people in general in churches and outside churches. I think we in some ways need to educate people where possible. Talk to God about your situation and I am sure he will help you with church.

It is important for Christians to come together if at all possible.

I have made various links with different Christians over the years which I still have now. It's the people really isn't it — the body of Christ. I hope this helps you.

Yours sincerely,

Jed

Dear Sue,

I'm sorry to hear that you feel unwanted at church. Of course, churches suffer from being made up of imperfect people and don't always function as they are supposed to, but I'm sure you know that. Sometimes churches appoint leaders on worldly grounds, and these people lack the spiritual discernment to properly advance the interests of their congregations. If this is the case in your church, I suggest you look for another church. Your reference to twisting the rules suggests to me that this could be so. A church that runs house groups might provide a good basis for getting support.

I believe that spiritual gifts should be affirmed by others; it should not be for a person to advance their own gifts, as that leads to pride. Unfortunately, we tend not to be good at doing this. I know I seldom compliment someone on their contribution to church life. If you consider when you might have failed to affirm someone else's gift, you might find it helps to understand why people fail to affirm yours. I have been complimented on the clarity of my public Bible reading, but only in the last couple of weeks has this been recognized by giving me a regular, instead of occasional, slot to do this — my first turn on the new rota is next Sunday. I have also been waiting for ages to do two presentations: one of my poetry and the other on developments in our understanding of biblical history. Neither opportunity has arisen and seems unlikely to within my church. I have instead sought alternative outlets; last month I was at a conference of the Association of Christian Writers when someone asked permission to use one of my poems. I think we gain God's approval by humbly declining to push ourselves forward.

In other respects I am well supported at church. My pastor's wife is a special-needs educational worker and has a good understanding of Asperger syndrome.

The second Sunday of February each year has been designated as Autism Sunday.

Perhaps next time it comes round, you could approach your church leadership and ask to be allowed to do something to mark the day.

I have been wondering recently whether it would be beneficial to try to set up a Christian Asperger network for mutual support. I envisage maybe a role collecting articles and prayer requests relating to Christianity and/or AS, and collating them into an occasional publication for mailing out. At least initially, I would not expect there to be many members.

Yours sincerely,

Colin

In over quarter of a century in churches of many denominations I have never felt, or been, excluded and have been allowed to use my spiritual gifts and talents. This is due to the following items which I offer as suggestions.

Firstly, in any church, everybody has to conform to the standards of Christ. Being observed to do this can, as has happened several times in my case, lead to one being given opportunities of service. Not conforming to this standard will mean one is not allowed to serve. Secondly, if you have experience of doing jobs in other churches, as I have, or professional qualifications which can be utilised (I was a school teacher so taught in Sunday school for years) it is easier to be asked to practise these gifts. Not having any experience or qualifications means training will be required, even operating the tea urn in our church requires instruction! Thirdly, be prepared to do anything, I've taught children, cleaned floors, put rubbish out, served refreshments and many other things. Hopefully this will be of use to Sue.

Elizabeth

Another letter to Sue appears on page 9, Ed.



letter to the editor

Being on the autistic spectrum and dying young

Dear AU,

I am a 26-year-old with Asperger syndrome. I was diagnosed in 1999 along with my brother, who has autism. My mother was also diagnosed as having AS within the same year. All of my family, I suspect, are on the autistic spectrum but do not have a diagnosis. I suspect because the rest of my family are from an older generation where a condition such as this would have gone unnoticed. It is only the three of us that have had a diagnosis. Sadly my mother passed away at the end of last year. Now it is just me, my brother, his father and my grandad left. I know that there are some relatives that are left through my mother's mother. We have never had anything to do with my mother's side of the family. Even though she loved her mother very much and was devastated and distraught when she had found out by her father early last year that her mother, who she had not seen in a long time, died. Her father had been informed by her mother's brother of the news. Then he, her uncle, had come over to discuss the funeral but after this we have no further contact with him. We had bumped into her aunt — this was the first time we had met her, as it was the first time with her uncle. My grandfather does not want his daughter's death to be told to her mother's side of the family. This, I think, is keeping them in the dark. But I understand why he doesn't want to. My mother had a sister and brother who is severely autistic and is being cared for in a residential home. My aunt is deceased. She passed away in 1997. What concerns me so is the fact that my mother and her sister both died at the same age of 41, which is such a coincidence. I feel that perhaps if it were not for being born with the condition, they may have still been alive here today.

Can people with autism/AS die young?

I have no way of proving or disproving my theory. I know people can die at any age. But I

feel that in this case it is a strange coincidence. I feel that our family are doomed and have been from start to finish. Two people in my family dying at the same age who are sisters — what else could it be? If it is not a disability?

I feel for myself and my brother. I fear for the both of us. As to how long we will live for, I would like to find an explanation and an answer to my theory and questions.

Any responses would be much appreciated.

Yours

Michelle

PS. Also there is physical deformity in my family, with me that being my foot. My foot is not the same as the other or like other or most people's and also my brother, who is my half-sibling, has a toenail missing. Is this, too, down to being on the autistic spectrum? My mother and sister died from separate conditions. My aunt having bowel cancer, which I feel was down to her diet. She was mainly just a meat eater. My mother died from a brain haemorrhage, an aneurysm which is found to be quite rare amongst the population.

Another thing is that I feel that the males in my family are outliving the females in my family. I thought that women were supposed to outlive men? Also I thought that children were meant to outlive their parents?

I am aware that a son or daughter can die before their parent.

But two people who are female who are sisters both dying at 41? I don't get it.

Also with my grandmother dying before my grandfather? It all adds up to one thing: the females in my family are passing before the males. My grandfather is still here even though old, and my uncle is still here, being the eldest of his two sisters, but is severely autistic. We are at a dead end.



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 by the editor, not the person who sends in the advert.)
- 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 61

Hello all,

My name is Edward, I am 20 years old and I have High-Functioning Autism.

I am at a home for adults with ASD and I am supported twenty-four hours a day. The carers also help me become more independent. I do, however, visit family quite often.

I have got many interests and enjoy making friends and meeting people.

I am looking for penpals at any ages and will be looking forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Edward

Pen pal number 62

Hi, my name is Serree, and I'm 45 and had my recognition (I hate the word "diagnosis"!) when I was 40. I am a qualified nursery nurse. My interests are ponies, dogs, John Denver, child development, and autism. I would like to hear from anyone on the spectrum to swap stories and experiences. One day I would like to write a book and sooner form a support group for Aspies in Devon.

The three pen-pal adverts on this page are from people who are under sixteen. Please note that Asperger United is unable to forward pen-pal letters to under-sixteens which are from people who are 18 or over, Ed.

Pen pal number 63

Hello,

my name is Daniel and I am 13 years of age. I am not very tall and get troubled at school about it and I have ADHD, Asperger's syndrome and dyslexia. I live with my mum, my brother, who is 15, and my mum's boyfriend.

I enjoy playing on my Playstation 2; I specifically like driver 3. I love drawing and draw a lot when I'm at home, and at school I doodle in my exercise books a lot too. I like going on MMORPGs (massive multiplayer online games) such as Runescape, Club Penguin, Adventure Quest and more.

I go on my Facebook and Youtube a lot to listen to music. My favourite singer is Basshunter. I enjoy a range of music from pop to metal. Sometimes I am violent towards my brother and feel really bad afterwards.

I am looking for a friend, male or female, aged 11-15 that shares some of my interests or would like a friend of my interests to talk to and maybe even meet. I live in Nottingham.

Pen pal number 64

Hi. I'm Zoe, and I'm 12 years old. I live with my older brother, who is a teacher, and my older sister, who lives at university. I have a rabbit, called Magic, and a very old cat called Mog. My two favourite things are dolphins and Disney. I want to be a marine biologist when I'm older, and I also know lots about whales and dolphins too! I love all Disney characters, and Winnie the Pooh. I love Tigger as well. My favourite football team is Chelsea. I like listening to music, and going on the computer. I also like my Wii and DS.

I'd like to hear from someone, boy or girl, aged 10-16.

Pen pal number 65

Hello, my name is Ben. I was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome when I was 13.

I would like to make some new friends who have similar interests as me.

I like playing computer games. My favourite TV shows are *the Simpsons* and *Little Britain*. I am a very big fan of music; all kinds really.

I am also educated at home because of my Asperger's. I live with my mum and my sister.

Thank you for taking the time to read my ad. Hope to hear from people soon.

Dumbed expression, stress compression

by Richard

In this world of breakout stress
a way of life you'd better caress
flog and work your guts like all the rest
else you're in a bloody big mess.

Like a horse that wants to vocalise
energies and wisdom it knows and understands
but can only dumbly prance and neigh about its yard
not reaching their stupid, stone-deaf ears.

Dear Sue,

I have read your letter to *Asperger United* in the July edition of the journal. I would like to respond.

Yes, I am a believer and attend church, and I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. I also have sleep apnoea and use equipment borrowed from hospital.

My church is very large and is part of a worldwide family of churches.

Yes, I too feel excluded at times in church. I help in children's ministry and one of the leaders with whom I lead was called to the front at a service, instead of me, and asked to organise a tug-of-war to illustrate a scripture that was being read to us. I feel undervalued and it is all to do with me being single, and disabled, as well as "different", which I observe, has become a polite bourgeois euphemism for "weird", "geeky", etc. I just wish that people in church who describe people like me as "different" would put their cards on the table once and for all. After each service, we have a chance to socialise over a cup of tea or coffee (us adults). What tends to happen here is that, if I start a conversation, people look round and think that I am "coming on to them", especially if the person I am talking to is female. The very person I am talking to often looks round in a snide and hinting way, and shares a smirk at my expense. What is the point of all this? I was picked on last year for saying something slightly inaccurate, at the end of a hard day of working with the children. The person who picked me up was our church's children's leader (a woman). But I'm not so bothered about this person's sex in this instance, just the over-the-top fuss that she made of my words, which caused other leaders to laugh belittlingly at me.

Our church leader refused to let me talk to the church about pets, another leader refused to let me talk to his youth group about music.

I am not going to give in. God wants me to persevere and I am due to talk to the home group I attend, about music, having already given them the crux of what I wanted to tell the congregation about pets. At a previous church I was refused access to the children's ministry — and all because lack of screening and interviewing meant anyone who was deemed to be even slightly odd, didn't get a chance. At that same church, the men's group went on a trip to an activity centre. The aim was for each member to conquer their fear of heights and walk along the high bars of a metal structure built for the purpose. When my turn came, I couldn't do the task because I found the ladder unsafe — there was a bad reaction from a group of girls who made me feel like a "wimp" — but that doesn't stop me from ringing the centre to advise them to make a pause in a long queue of people waiting to use the ladder, in order to make it firmer and safer.

Sue, do you get on with any of the leaders in your church? Try to make friends with one of them. I have. He has been most helpful. Also, suggest that you get together with others to give a talk and Q-and-A session on Asperger's syndrome — and another talk at church on your epilepsy. In these ways, your church will be able to get to know you better and respect you more.

Yours sincerely,

Tim

These letters were sent on to Sue, who has replied:

Dear Asperger United,

thank you for printing my letter, which has got quite a few replies.

Things are more stable now in church since the new pastor came in March and I am now included a lot more,

Sue

Dear friends,

as it is mental health month in the magazine, I am writing to contribute.

My ten years at state schools, from the age of 5 to 15, were hell. I was kicked, punched, scratched, knocked down and subject to verbal abuse. It became a way of life. Leaving at 15 — I just didn't go back and the school could not care less. I was a nobody. Left on my own after that I lost the ability to speak, and can only answer questions. However, I studied and eventually gained a BSc degree from the Open University. I then applied for a job at the HQ of the church I attended in London. From day one I was subjected to bullying and shouting. I had gone from one hell to another. I stuck this for eleven years, knowing I would not get a job elsewhere, and I gradually became mentally ill, having panic attacks. On one occasion, not being able to communicate verbally, I pushed a chair across the room and threw some paper in the air (this was afterwards given as evidence that I was "aggressive").

I was having more and more time off work and my GP gave me a letter to take to my employer, saying that I could only return to work if I was removed from the office of the man who was bullying

and shouting all the time. My employer (head of a religious organisation) told me to "take it or leave". What could I do? I "took" it and went back into the same office. I got more and more ill and one morning I went into work almost in a coma, and as the man started shouting I pushed him. I was in such a state that I was taken to hospital in an ambulance.

From then on I was in the third hell — worse than the other two put together. I was seen by a lady psychiatrist who said I was evil; that I should be put on a charge and that I was dangerous because I was autistic as (in her words) autistic people cannot understand how other people feel, so are more likely to attack them!

I had been getting better before seeing this woman but she was hostile to me as soon as I entered the room and I could not understand why I was evil. I said that if I were evil then I would rather die. I got into a terrible state and had one panic attack after the other. Instead of getting help I was put on Section 3, which I was given to understand meant I was a prisoner and could not leave the psychiatric hospital. The word "hospital" is very misleading as it is nothing like a hospital. It has one very long corridor with rooms going off each side,

each one with an en suite. TVs are not allowed in the rooms — there is only a communal one so the chances of seeing anything one likes is slim. Unlike a normal prison there is no table tennis, pool table, etc. and all one has to do is to walk up and down the long corridor. I could not understand why this was being done to me so sometimes I tried to get out and struggled with staff when they tried to stop me — this was put in my medical notes as proof of my aggression and violence and I was put, over and over again, into the isolation room. I was plied with drugs because of my so-called aggression, and that in turn affected me physically till I became like an old man with Parkinson's, and also had trembling-limbs syndrome. No-one cared about this although my mother wrote letter after letter to everyone she could think of begging for help, even to my GP, but none of them answered. Where were the samaritans?

My mother made several Appeals on my behalf but it seems I was being kept there on the recommendation of the psychiatrist woman, who had said that I was to be placed in a secure mental home, and no vacancies could be found. I was told that I would either stay in the "hospital" or go into a mental home on her instructions.

The managers were dubious about this and at each Appeal queried as to why I had to be shut away. Finally, after seven-and-a-half months, the managers overruled the psychiatrists and told me I was free to go. None of the recommendations given by the woman psychiatrist, who caused me to be kept there for all that time, were carried out.

I was given no trial. My mother, who is my carer, was never consulted or told anything. She now has all my medical notes and in them it states she was to be kept in the dark as she had rights which they did not want her to know about. For four years she has tried to get justice for me and to stop this happening to other autistic people but, unlike normal prisoners, and failed asylum-seekers, autistic people cannot get Legal Aid. Appeals to the Healthcare Commission, the Ombudsman, and the General Medical Council were in vain, as all those organisations just tell the people complained about to investigate themselves!

Among my medical notes were copies of letters written by the head of our church and also by the man who bullied and shouted at me for eleven years and they were nothing short of vindictive. Both of these men left their jobs shortly after, having been given the cold shoulder by the rest of the staff over their treatment of me.

Autistic/Asperger's people have two disabilities — one they are born with and the other imposed on them by society.

Yours sincerely

Neil

Mental health aspects of autism and Asperger syndrome

by **Mohammad Ghaziuddin**

Jessica Kingsley publishers

ISBN: 978 1843 10727 9

£13.95/\$19.95

review by **Neil**

Described as the "first book to address the increasingly urgent need for information about psychiatric problems in people with ASDs", it systematically explains the psychological and emotional difficulties that are often encountered. As an experienced psychiatrist specialising in autism, the author describes each condition that is commonly experienced by adults and children with ASDs, including schizophrenia, depression, anxiety and tic disorders; and gives sound advice on their early detection and treatment.

Numerous case studies are included, which helpfully illustrate typical presentation of the problem being reviewed. A very helpful description of AS is included early on in the book, setting out its history, prevalence, clinical features (social deficits, communication, single-minded pursuits, cognitive functioning and clumsiness), aetiology, neurobiology, diagnosis, differential diagnosis, treatment and outcome.

This book is a valuable part of my AS library, and I'd recommend it to anyone who is interested in exploring themselves in depth to find out whether they are mad, bad or just Aspie!

Please note there are two different Neils on this page, Ed.

Asperger syndrome — a love story

by Sarah Hendrickx and Keith Newton

ISBN: 978 1 84310 540 4 £12.99/\$18.95

The Asperger couple's workbook

practical advice and activities for couples and counsellors

by Maxine Aston

ISBN: 978 1 84310 253 3 £14.99/\$24.95

Counselling for Asperger couples

by Barrie Thompson

ISBN: 978 1 84310 544 2 £24.99/\$49.95

all published by Jessica Kingsley publishers

review by **the Goth**

Jessica Kingsley (the publishers) have produced so many books aimed at adults in the last couple of years, that I'm going to review three related books all in this one review. Essentially, all three cover the same subject: how to make a long-term relationship work when things aren't going smoothly.

Asperger syndrome — a love story is, at its heart, a double autobiography: Sarah and Keith are a couple who met when his AS was unknown, they split up, but then forged a successful relationship. It is a story told in uncompromising detail, and will be useful for those not yet in a relationship as well as those who are.

In contrast, the Asperger couple's workbook and Counselling for Asperger couples are written in a more "marriage guidance counsellor" way. Most of the information they contain is available from other books, such as using cards to indicate the mood of the AS person, but both books provide practical help in applying such techniques in a relationship which has problems. Both books are useful, but only for those in relationships already or for people training to be counsellors. Barrie's style is more difficult to read, but his points are presented very clearly, so I recommend it for anyone having difficulty understanding the descriptions from other books.

The four books reviewed on pages 11 and 12 are available from Central Books Ltd, the book distributor for the NAS
tel: **0845 458 9911**
or on line at:
www.autism.org.uk/pubs
and can also be ordered from all good bookshops.

Special offer: readers can get copies of these four books post-free until 30 Nov 2009. Just send your order, with a cheque made payable to the NAS, to:

The NAS
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG

Dear AU,

my name is Michelle. I am 25 years old. I grew up with my mum and sister. Growing up with mother, who has a manic depressive disorder, was a very emotional and sometimes stressful journey. I know if she had the chance she'd probably say the same about me. I was diagnosed with having AS in 2008. During this time I was in hospital trying to overcome my fears.

Growing up I was bullied through almost all of my primary school years. I attended small groups in school. They let our group do cooking, story writing and music groups. I also used drama to help me to connect to the other children. I guess I enjoyed some things in my primary school, like music (recorder groups) and cooking too. I used to get nervous and suffer from panic attacks. I would run out of the classroom and lock myself in the toilets. Reading was something that I enjoyed. I read the entire library in our school by the time I was seven.

I'd get bored really easily and I had lots of energy. The boys who used to pick on me I would give as good as I received. I wouldn't say all the fights were just energy, some were territorial. I would get overprotective of my sister and other children. Without thinking this would sometimes put me in the firing line.

Sometimes when I got really nervous I'd miss lunch and not eat. I would hide in the classroom and home wasn't much better. I would hide under my bed or in cupboards to block out noises.

At the age of nine I started to see people's faces clearly and found that I could remember things more. Before this things would be blank or just not there.

I'd play with my sister and she was really imaginative. I do have an imagination too. It's just sometimes it was more difficult to see reality. One time, my sister and I, we had to climb Mount Everest (that was staircase). We even had a tornado right through our room.

Secondary school wasn't much better, but I tried imitating other students, taking bits of each of their personalities just to try to be a teenager. At 14, I finally made some friends who offered me to the cinema. I pushed myself to go with them, but I found the experience a little boring.

I had spent eight years locking myself away. I was told by my GP that I had agoraphobia. From the age of 17 to 25 I stayed in my home. The child in me that felt wild and feral was calm inside. The world changed outside my windows, but inside my home it stayed the same. I felt safe in my home. It had so many memories of all emotions and people past and present. Some people who I know I'd never see again and who I missed dearly; like my babysitter.

Just a few weeks ago I couldn't handle it. Even though I have been going out since I left the hospital last year, the change was too much. I've never moved before and I felt so dead inside. I tried to kill myself and ended up in hospital.

The crisis team who came to see me took their time and helped me to slowly integrate into my new home. I am really grateful for everything that they did for me. I attend other therapies to help me to communicate with people more and understand social situations.

I am looking to the future and I'm trying to be strong. I attend college now. I'm used to day-to-day life in our new home, but I still get anxious for one of us and I suffer with mental health problems too.

Sometimes I tell myself off because I can get moody and stroppy like a teenager. However, I soon pull myself up with the support of the people around me.

Reading the AU edition has made me feel better. Like I belong somewhere.

Thank you for reading my letter,

Michelle

This article has been written in response to your request for material on mental health

My name is Andy and I am 28. I have had mental health problems. I take the anti-psychotic Risperidone and the anti-depressant Paroxetine. These help me. Having AS and also being mentally ill cost me my job. My co-workers were unable to tolerate someone different from themselves. I worked with adults with learning disabilities and got on well with them. My colleagues in my opinion did not do the job properly. They washed soiled bedding on a quick wash cycle so I got very angry. I love washing machines and know more about them than they do.

I get visited weekly by Dawn and Mike from the Early Intervention Service. They are great and I like them very much. The psychiatrist from the Early Intervention Service is very clever. He knew first of all

that I had AS. I am grateful to Dawn and Mike for getting me into and out of hospital when I needed to.

I am so scared. I feel unable to go out on my own. It's too dangerous, not just for me but anyone who approaches me. I have studied a variety of martial arts, including cage fighting, to increase my confidence and try to lessen my fear. The forensic psychiatrist says I am unlikely to hurt anyone and I never have before. I am not violent. I am not a bully. In fact, I have been the victim of bullying all through school and I feel I was bullied out of my job.

To finish, I'd like to say I have a dog whom I love and kiss very much and she (Sophie) is beneficial to my mental health.

Employee training courses

Prospects, the employment service of the National Autistic Society

advert by **Daniel Aherne**

Prospects recognise that employees with an ASC may not receive training that meets their individual needs. We have designed three one-day courses that cover common areas of difficulty faced by individuals with an ASC.

These courses which are group-based and give you the opportunity to learn more about specific areas, share your experiences of work and learn from other people with an ASC.

The courses are:

Communication skills at work

This course aims to help you feel more confident about communicating with people at work.

Dealing with anxiety in the workplace

This course aims to help you to understand what causes anxiety and looks at strategies to help you reduce this anxiety.

Personal management skills for the workplace

This course will help you to manage your time at work and to organise and prioritise your workload.

For more information on these courses please contact Daniel Aherne, who works for Prospects in London. His e-mail is daniel.aherne@nas.org.uk Alternativley, you can ring him on **0207 704 7450**.

Your opinion wanted about possible changes to *Asperger United*

Firstly, I would like to assure you that if there is strong feeling amongst the readership, then no changes will take place.

Secondly, I have been producing *Asperger United* for four years, so you are already familiar with my style, and I intend to follow in John's footsteps with editorial decisions. For these four years I have been negotiating with the NAS for *AU* to have more pages (it is a coincidence that agreement has been reached at the same time as I take over the editorship). This change gives us an opportunity to consider various alterations to the magazine which should make it easier to read for more people, so I'm going to list some changes that I'm considering. Please let me know what you think, and please suggest changes of your own. No changes will happen before the responses to this article have been discussed in the magazine.

- 1 Colour has been much-requested: artists would like to be able to submit both colour and low-contrast pieces, not just the high-contrast monochrome at present. If colour is introduced, I would still propose keeping the "feel" of the current black-and-white cover by keeping the top part plain and simple.
- 2 Many people are confused by the title "*united Asperger*" as it appears on the magazine cover. So it could be moved to read "*Asperger united*".
- 3 Some people do not like the small u used for "*united*", so this could be changed.
- 4 People with dyslexia hate the Times font because it is difficult for them to read, so we could change this.
- 5 People with dyslexia and with other reading difficulties have problems with the harsh black-on-white text. One possible solution to this would be to alternate, say, very dark blue and very dark purple text, and perhaps print the internal pages on cream paper.

6 Many readers also struggle to tell where one piece ends and the next begins when on one page. Currently pieces are separated by thin lines of black: these could be replaced by fatter, paler rectangles.

7 The NAS brand uses more white space around text, and this typically makes articles easier to read. This aspect of the NAS brand could be used, along with their "loop" on the cover.

8 More space would allow me to explain various procedures, such as what to do about your subscription when you move.

9 *Asperger United* could move to six editions each year instead of the current four.

There is no question of these potential changes resulting in charging for *AU*; thanks to ever-more-widespread computerisation of the machinery, colour printing has been dropping rapidly in price over the last ten years (as has the cost of monochrome printing to a lesser extent). Each copy of *AU* currently costs a third of what it cost in 2005.

Importantly, if a few changes can help make *AU* accessible to another 10,000 people who find it helpful, then surely that is a good thing?

Asperger United is also getting a new database: this should put an end to most of the problems that subscribers have been suffering from, such as receiving a duplicate copy.

Lastly, people are always asking me about my name: I do not wear black; I like Beethoven and Kate Bush; I am not really sure why people chose to call me the Goth, but disparate individuals on three separate occasions called me it, and each time it stuck: at school, at college and at university. Finally, I decided to perpetuate it — I find it acts as a signal that I am a bit odd, and I find that useful in life.

the Goth

Debatewise

advert by **Dave**

Think about it for more than a second: two opinions colliding in a structured format in a neutral venue causing people to be better informed about the arguments at stake. Well that was the idea behind the formation of Debatewise in late 2008 and the site has expanded since then.

The easy way to think of it is as a sort of debating version of Wikipedia although it can be used for a wide range of purposes such as revision for exams both in university/college and sixth form. To this effect Debatewise is holding the first World Online Debating Championship this summer. This will be made up of thirty-two teams competing over five rounds in a straight knockout tournament that brings together the length of test cricket with the cut and thrust of politics at Westminster.

What Debatewise really needs though is content and that's where you the reader and thinker come in. We're looking for intelligent, independent-minded volunteers who would be interested in joining the Debatewise Rapid Response Team. This would involve writing new debates or adding points and counter-arguments on current issues over a wide range of different areas, from whether schools should be teaching social skills like empathy (a possibly contentious issue for autistic people) to whether Britain should introduce proportional representation for the houses of parliament. You don't just have to have an

interest in politics to participate. There are lots of other areas, such as sport or business, where you can make a contribution. You can be of any age to be part of the team. The current intake of people are students or recent graduates but we're expecting a lot of them to move on as the academic year ends and people graduate so we're looking for a new class of 2009, so to speak.

If you joined, each week we'd e-mail you a list of subjects and you'd be able to choose which debates you created or worked on. In return, you would get a reference for the work you put in; something that has helped past interns go on to find paid work because getting debate experience and working for a non-profit is good on a CV. You'd also get a mysterious, not-so-mythical thing known as Karma which is Debatewise's way of expressing appreciation and quantifying the work you put in against the other users on the site. And above all you'd get the chance to use your brain to the best of your abilities by developing, honing and maintaining research and debating skills as well as independent research. Maybe it will give you a chance to develop your thoughts on some issues too.

To join, you need to contact **dave@debatewise.com** to sign up and register online at **www.debatewise.com**, which you can also do if you want to participate without being an intern.



Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road,
London EC1V 1NG.
Telephone: 020 7903 3542. Fax: 020 7833 9666.
Email: asp.utd@nas.org.uk
Website: www.autism.org.uk/aspergerunited

