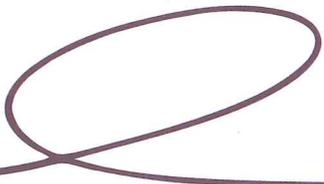


Produced by and for autistic people

Asperger *United*

Edition 89 January 2017



Asperger United

Asperger United is a magazine run by and for autistic adults (although some parents subscribe on behalf of their under-sixteens). The magazine aims to put people who have 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. Discussions on editorial choices will not be entered into. *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 £9 per year from overseas readers and £15 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: the Goth

National Autistic Society production support:
the Publications Team

NAS phone support: the Supporter Care Team

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, John Joyce and the current editor, the Goth (who does not wear black).

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 Kaczynski, formerly Cohen.

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:

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Tel: **020 7923 5779** (geographical charges apply)

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

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 magazine.

Asperger United is available in **large print** on A3 sheets (double the size of this page). If you need large print, please let us know using the email address or postal address above.

Contributions for the next issue should reach *AU* by **13 February 2017**

Welcome to the January edition of *Asperger United*.

As this is the creativity issue, perhaps I should tell you about the giant ravens that visited me recently. They were scarily insistent about getting into the house, but they'd brought scones and jam, so it would have been churlish of me to turn them away.

I think it will take my collection of Mukkanese teas a long time to recover.

It appeared that they'd come to discuss my ideas about the work of Calabi and Yau, which covers socks in the early universe, at least when

described using infinitely differentiable Riemannian manifolds. I'm not sure, though as they kept things close to their breasts.

I'm not even sure what the things were, but they were clearly intelligent and had prehensile tails, which seemed a bit redundant given they had six hands as well.

Anyway, when you read this AutSpeak (advertised last issue) may have already happened, so I will hope to have seen some of you there,

yours,

the Editor

the creativity edition — suggestion for next issue on page 11

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Asperger's people can't create?

by Alfie Cooke

Asperger's people don't do creative. We can't do poetry. We don't understand art and we don't like noise, so we shouldn't be exposed to music. This was the mantra given out in teacher training twelve years ago and until I left the profession last year, it was still being preached from the highest pulpits that stupidity could find. The good news, of course, is that apparently we're all excellent at maths!

While there may be a degree of difficulty experienced by those with forms of autism when it comes to understanding poetry and what gets referred to as "imaginative language", in my experience, this is because those teaching it don't really understand what it is they are dealing with — both in the subject and the children they are teaching. The school system is great at subjects like maths because maths is rules, (and if there's one thing we like in school it's a long list of harsh and inflexible rules). Creativity, on the other hand, is that . . . thing, you know, (and here you have to imagine a hand vaguely fluffing around in the air to indicate something deeply intangible and impossible to explain).

The difficulty that many of us have with creativity (both those on the spectrum

and those off it) is that by the age of six, schools had told us to stop imagining (unless it was for a story) and to think instead. Throughout our earliest years, we were trained to cease our creativity unless it was specifically called for in the subject: music (where non-musicians taught us just that music was really hard), art (where non-artists taught us that only the really gifted kids could draw) and literacy (where non-writers taught us that a story needs full stops, capital letters and must have some speech in it to make it really good). During my career as a teacher, I've even had Asperger's children taken out of class during art and music in order to do "something less creative" as the headteacher explained it.

Everyone has the capacity to be creative. Despite my Asperger's, and despite having an education that wasn't far off from the description I've given above, I've taught myself to play music (which I do semi-professionally), I've taught myself to write creatively (getting various things published here and there), and taught myself to paint — and some of my weird art occasionally sells! Asperger's isn't defined by a crippling lack of creativity that means we will only ever succeed as

accountants. What we all need — unless we want the struggle of teaching ourselves — is someone to show us the way. At its most basic, music is just sounds put together in a way we like, art is just visuals put together in a way we like and creative writing is just words put together in a way we like! And when something we do touches our heart or our mind — or better still those of others — then we are being creative.

Finally, for those not convinced that they can be creative, a lesson:

1. First, take your forename, or the name of a town or a country (what we teachers like to call proper nouns).
2. Next, pretend it's a verb and stick "-ing" on the end — for me this would make "alfying" (we can't dispense with the spelling rules just yet!).
3. Then, give your word a meaning, stick it in a sentence and see how it feels, for example: Gavin the Bear was alfying at the river, waiting for salmon.
4. What you have done is brought a new word into your world. You have created.

Creativity

by Lisa

Both my sisters and I drew a lot as children and Mum encouraged us to be “culture vultures”, taking us to galleries and exhibitions in places as far afield as Florence and Paris. My eldest sister sketched immaculate drawings and much to my amusement used me as one of her muses. Likewise my middle sister dressed me up and photographed me. She also wrote and read profusely and played the guitar. As a teenager it was first a velvet-backed diary and finally a music centre which saved me from the complete absence of ego identity, so common I believe in people with Asperger’s who can mould themselves to fit so expertly other people’s assumptions and expectations.

It saddens me therefore to hear anyone, young, old or indifferent, denigrate their’s or another’s creativity. Given time, skill and patience anyone’s raw experience can be sculpted into some form of expression, whether the simple act of tapping a foot to a dripping tap or the more complex task of painting in oils. Creativity must be allowed to be mundane, part of everyday life, not just for those with a special certificate, although they too can be helpful. Look at any house or garden: even the most sterile of places will hide some glimmer of energy whether in the matching of the toilet roll holder with the loo seat cover or the twist of a handmade spiral staircase.

Scientists are now recognising that art is a tool which can not only enhance an already successful life but also ease a stultified one, and getting in there early with children gives you the best chance to foster the imagination. Children who are allowed to make what might traditionally be viewed as “mistakes” or “messes” will grow up with their daydreams intact and therefore more chance of trusting their instincts as adults. I only gave up my childhood camera when I eventually found the pen was just as absorbing. Had it not been for such great invisible friends

as these I could have ended up in hospital. I returned my sisters’ favour and joined what we called the “mutual adoration society”, snapping them from the window of my room as they lay on the carpet in the garden with their boyfriends or raided the dressing-up drawer. Thus we grew up with a sense of our own watchability and a healthy interest in viewing others as subjects. The extent to which my sisters’ many interpretations of me may have altered my sense of self I cannot say. It was others’ attentions that generally intruded, such as the boyfriend of my aunt who photographed me on holiday, aged 12 or 13.

We had pets too, which encouraged play and a sense of belonging. And our parents moved in arty circles. Particularly fascinating to me were the screen-printed murals of giraffes and zebras printed by one such friend and we were all inspired by various teachers. I will never forget the day I won a prize for my weaving nor the moment of my beloved teacher’s whispered “Well done” when I stepped out in front of an adult audience to improvise during a hold-up in a primary school pantomime. These landmarks, however, were insufficient to instil me with confidence, a fact I can only put down to the strict rules society placed upon my parents’ generation and their lack of awareness of their own Asperger’s syndrome, leaving them feeling like fish out of water and trying to compensate for their unhappy marriage by pushing their children to over-achieve.

So there are no guarantees in this creativity malarky; no obvious correlation between a child who sees their own drawing displayed in the kitchen and is able, in later life, to overcome an everyday problem such as getting lost in an unfamiliar city. However, if an individual’s unique vision is valued for all that it is, they are more likely to find their way home eventually, as I did, even though it took all of 48 years.

What's my point in being here?

by N

Twenty-three pounds and fifty pence a day — that's how much is paid for me to live here, to him. I was living here for years before he came along! I don't have much left; he has a business, too!

It's money again: it gets in the way, I don't like it, will people not do anything unless they get it: where's care in the world?

I desire to work voluntarily, I already get money for not working, and with what others may like to call my disability, it would be difficult to work in employment and I wouldn't get paid better, I feel.

I see people in giant cars: I guess they need these to motivate selves — I do not have the capacity to do what they do, the functionality to work in jobs where I can be as good as them!

I can only remain a small useless person, I feel, doing so very little!

I gave another £5 to a homeless man the other day: it's one of my pleasures of life to see the smile, rather, delight, on his face; he seems so nice, so thankful, why does he thank me? — it's not my money, I didn't earn it in a job — it was only given to me!

Then again, if it wasn't given to me it may have been given to someone else who wouldn't give it to the deserving nice man living on the street — perhaps that's one good point for me being here: I know £5 doesn't take much generosity, it doesn't make me very good — I still don't work for a wage!

Those people in big cars will have so much more money: I feel they will be able to give so much more away to help people than I can, I can never be as good or as worthwhile as them!

I didn't get paid helping the elderly, when the woman was sick on the floor and on me. I just cleaned it up. When the old lady shouted abuse at me I just took it: it hurt, but I deserved it, as I don't work for a wage! When the man defecated on the floor, I cleaned it. You may think I sound good for doing it, but I'm not!

I gave that job up after just six weeks as the anxiety became bad and I also had some days I could not face up going in! Tell me what you think, am I bad or do I have a purpose? I think lots of you have a purpose — maybe I do too, let me know? Perhaps an entire *Asperger United* theme could be “our purpose”?

Hello to all individuals with autism,

I refer to the feature by Emma, October 2015. The first five words that Emma writes, “As an individual with Asperger's” fixes my interest. I am also an individual with Asperger's.

I am now going to pay Emma the best compliment I could pay to any human being. Emma has the same attitude to her children as my mother had to me.

My mother never interfered with my natural way of being — she recognised that

I was different but also that my differences (as Emma would concur, I'm sure) were not the manifestation of an illness or a disease. I was fortunate, I was suited to my autism, my differences were odd, very odd, but for my way of being, benign. And I was even more fortunate in that I had a mother who recognised that I was not broken. There was nothing that needed fixing.

To try and fix someone who is not broken is likely to break that someone.

Michael

Pen pals

Pen pal number 232

Hi, my name is Antonella, I'm 24 years old and I live with my mum and sister in London. I was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome when I was 22 years old. My interests are: I like making cards — I like all sorts of art and craft. I like video games and I like going to restaurants, parties, discos, etc.

I'm a huge Richard Fleeshman fan and have been since I was 14 years old. I still am even if he does have a girlfriend, lol.

I would love to write to someone at a similar age to me for preference also with the same interests, thanks, xxx

Pen pal number 233

Hello there! My name is Samantha, though all my friends call me Sam :) Am 22 years old, have Asperger's syndrome, dyspraxia and chronic fatigue syndrome and have two brothers, one of which has severe autism. I have social anxiety, which is why placing this ad is a big step for me. I hope to one day finally become qualified and get to work with young children — unfortunately this has proven problematic but hope to one day succeed :)

I love animals, especially cats, and reading and writing fiction. I also love anime and manga, and video games, mainly Nintendo :D I also love sci-fi :3 I would love to hear from anyone of either gender, preferably around the same age as me, but do not mind a little older or younger :) I look forward to hearing from you!

How to place a pen-pal advert

- > All you need to do is send your advert along with your name and address (and email address if you want) to *Asperger United*. You can use the Royal Mail or email. The next pen-pal number will be given to your advert when it arrives.
- > Please note that *AU* does not print dating adverts, as it is unable to provide suitable support.
- > Those under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen-pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.
- > If you get no replies, please don't take this personally.

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.)
- > Please remember to put your address on your letter.
- > To contact a pen pal, please send your letter to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG, or email asp.utd@nas.org.uk
- > 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.

****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.

more pen pals

Twenty pen-pal adverts have been held over for publication in the next five issues, Editor.

Pen pal number 234

My name is Claire, I'm 32 years old, I got diagnosed with Asperger's when I was 10. My hobbies include craft, theatre both on- and off-stage, the outdoors — walking, camping and swimming. I help Rainbows, the youngest members of guiding and I enjoy meals out and tenpin bowling. I would like to hear from those the same age who enjoy some of the same hobbies. I would like people who don't live too far away.

I have found it difficult to hold down a job because somebody will say or do something that I take the wrong way and then, to put it lightly, all hell breaks loose. I have been unemployed for years and because of my work gap most employers turned me down. Some didn't even interview me. I now have a job: they gave me the job because of the gap and the fact that they could see that I was trying and not just watching TV all day long. I think it's the perfect job 'cause everybody is understanding and although it's mainly males that work there, that doesn't matter 'cause women can do anything a man can do, it is no longer the Victorian times when women are just housewives. I think anybody can do any job and, so long as there are no misunderstandings and everybody understands, then there's no reason why a job can't last. I'm hoping to stay where I am now as it's perfect.

Pen pal number 235

Hi, I am Matthew and am 25 years old, I'm currently in prison, for a mistake I made, but I'm facing up to it. I was diagnosed with Asperger's along with autism and ADHD when I was 10.

I'm a very keen writer, I write a lot of poetry and short stories, I've been writing poetry for about eight months now and have had some published.

I'm a qualified chef and also love to be in the kitchen, I love music, specifically the music of Elvis Presley, as I grew up with his music, but I do like modern stuff too: I particularly like Taylor Swift and Ed Sheeran.

I love to sing although I can't hold a note or tune! Lol.

I'm an outgoing and bubbly person and get on well with all.

I just hope people can get over the fact that I'm in prison and get over the stigma attached: I'm just like anyone else, I'm a human being and have made mistakes and unfortunately it's led me into jail. I'm just looking for someone to write to, to alleviate my feelings of loneliness.

I welcome anyone to write and I look forward to hearing from you!

Pen pal number 236

Hello, my name is Sarah, I am 18 years old. I found out I had Asperger's when I was 14.

I love books, especially classic literature and sometimes enjoy fantasy epics. I like learning, watching TED (Technology, Engineering, Design), working in Photoshop, watching films, crocheting and making things with my hands.

I have lots of cats, dogs and horses at home — I adore them all and always have lots of funny stories about what mischief they get up to! I ride horses and am doing my British Horse Society exams and if I can finish them I will be qualified to teach riding and would like to help others like myself benefit from horses. My favourite discipline is dressage.

I have been home-schooled since I was 14 and hope to do an OU degree. I help in my family photography studio business but am quite isolated so I would like to have a pen pal. I find social situations difficult. I would like to hear from people with similar interests or qualities, who are kind, calm, polite and perhaps, like me, quite isolated and not social beings. I look forward to hearing from you.

Twisting and turning coloured cubes

by Atik

I have Asperger's syndrome, and I experience these thinking states in writing:

I am going to write in to *Asperger United*: to talk about what it means to me when I spend an allocated amount of time on a systematic basis, what doors of creativity this activity brings to my senses doing Rubik's cubes. How it hinders motivation for various set goals, and how it gives both a false and true perception of what I could be good at. I believe that this model of puzzle activities measures skills. But when I question how it measures my skill, the engaged active person cubing, I come to a reasonable conclusion and say skill is also determined by time and memory.

[R, L, F, D2, B, U, R', L', F', D', B2', U', X, X', Y, Y', Z', Z, S, S', M2', M' E, E', anticlockwise, clockwise, algorithms, prime, permutations, orientation, first two layers, cube-solving, speed-cubing, mind, memory, perseverance, restore order to chaos after solved.]

I know a bit about computing, and know a bit about coding, and know things about the world, I know what light means, I know, I know — do I understand what I know? I confuse understanding with knowing, and at times I distinguish them. I look above, I see letters, symbols, numbers, R, L, B2' etc. Is this the world I am in? or is it a world full of pictorial visual objects? What is the world? It's what's hidden from sight and what's visible to sight. I hold my cube in my hand, and think that what thinks is a treasurable resource, not the respected Rubik's cube but the wholeness of the human brain.

As I turn the cube, I match then I do not match, and I continue to form unity, and division; I see who I truly am; I see who I would want to be; I see what stands in my way; I see achievements; I see distress; I see mood; I see my time in life; I solve partial parts and feel joyed

and cry; I feel excitement; chaos, confusion, competition, alleviation. Many of these attributes come in tides, and sometimes appear one by one.

I can go on and on . . . really I have to.

Whatever I do I get input and output messages that morph into unexplained symbols, that say you exert time to be a wannabee. I live a life with no escape from this perplexing, confusing, bewildering world. I can create music in my head, expand upon my ideas, relish my thinking. But what do all these achievements mean to me, because I am me, I am who awakes with challenges that matter to me, and often choose being involved in other tasks that have no goals for me. I seek concrete opportunities that matter to me, and endeavour to avoid randomly making decisions that matter less to me.

In a nutshell, this article indirectly emphasises my decision-making in correlation with strengths/weaknesses that are related to personal skills, but these strengths/weaknesses are not constant. They can improve or worsen.

I am a puzzle activities co-ordinator, I run Rubik's cube puzzle workshops in Liverpool at both the Brain Charity and at public libraries.

I have reached an organisation in Liverpool for blind and partially sighted people, using the Rubik's TouchCube, bradburyfields.org.uk

I am passionate about popularising this retro puzzle to people from all walks of life.

I would like other organisations to work with me to expand upon this throughout the country, thank you.

letters to the Editor

Dear Goth

There is nothing better than performing a random act of kindness for someone. I have always been of the belief that you should help other people whenever you can. I very well remember the time when I was in a post office in central Manchester some years ago. I was there to fill out my playslip for the lottery. Before I had a chance to do that an elderly lady came up to me and asked me if I would fill out her playslip as she didn't have her glasses with her. I did as I was asked. The lady in question thanked me then had her slip scanned. I filled out my playslip. Minutes later the lady in question came over to me and handed me a lucky dip ticket that she had bought for me as a thank-you for helping her. I've never forgotten that moment and I never will. Not only do random acts of kindness help others by way of bringing happiness into their lives, they also bring happiness to those who perform them. This is just one of many random acts of kindness that have regularly taken place in my life.

Yours faithfully

Glenn

Hello,

I am not sure if you can put this in *Asperger United* magazine but I hope you can.

Hello to all readers of this magazine.

Does anyone remember the pen-pal club for people with learning disabilities known as Write Away? They were based in London. I used to be a member and had some pen pals thanks

Hi Goth,

I was feeling particularly low and in desperate of some "encouragement". I find I am in two places, it is sometimes useful to read the difficulties people suffer because we are all in it together, however sometimes it makes me so angry and sad when people hurt other living things. When I am in a "dark" place it helps to speak to someone who is "funny" or positive it renews my batteries (emotional).

I used to be able to insert myself in a book so that I could be in a completely different world. Unfortunately for almost ten years I have had the worst noisy neighbours ever, the last one was evicted — but it was such a long process of having to collect the evidence via the council's noise team. The new neighbour is quiet. I have had to force the landlord via the Housing Ombudsman to force them to let me have what I signed for on my tenancy agreement — and I stressed I am not asking for any

to this club. Unfortunately, I lost contact with people whom I met through this club. Not only that, I lost contact with people whom I met through two pen-pal magazines, *Person to person* and *Destiny international*. I hope there are some readers of *Asperger United* magazine who can help me. If so I would be very grateful.

Kind regards

Natalie

favours. It seems to be working at the moment. Noise makes me so stressed and tired.

I will share a few jokes with you. Maybe one or two will make you laugh. NTs call my jokes corny. It's what I find funny because they create a picture in my mind.

What do you call a camel with no hump?

*Humphrey — it causes a split in my mind I see a camel with no hump, but the man whose name is Humphrey.

What's the definition of a will?

*It's a "dead" give away!

Did you hear about the cross-eyed teacher?

*She couldn't control her pupils!

Hope you have a nice day!

Jacqui

You will be relieved that I have nothing for the next issue.

Except for a few odd filler comments from the last issue.

Lincoln Imp — actually the picture is the aliens saying you-to-us are everything (aspies and punning strikes again!).

Fellow Cynosure — they don't like that we stand out as they want everyone to blend into their world (be no threat to their idea of normality).

Eleanor — questions are a burden to others, as they said in Patrick McGooohan's TV series *The prisoner*. It is distressing to be put in the limelight as though you are under interrogation.

Tom, Triclops, Angela, Tracey — we have a need for silence and stillness (meditation through nature etc.) to recover from the noise, motion and emotion of this world.

(Pikachu — gobbledygook is how things appear when we need to zone out from too much input).

Emotion is for lying dramatists, who want to manipulate others through negativity (wallowing in self pity, which is not us).

Professor Jaan Panksepp in America has come to the conclusion that we should treat depression by accentuating the positive, not

treating the negative — in other words sympathy will drag you into the world of the negative where empathy will encourage or allow people to come out of their misery, not join them through feeling guilt.

Lastly, I can smell differences in people because of their diet. (I have ideas for scientific research to prove this but I am not a scientist, so I may not get anyone interested in trials to test this is fact rather than appearance, theory rather than reality.)

Tony

I can smell different diets too, and I've experimented with giving friends, say, a Thai diet for a few weeks — they take on the smell of that diet. I find it particularly noticeable with vegetarians, vegans and people who eat a lot of beef, Editor.

If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for April will be **anxiety and coping with anxiety**. We all manage at least some of the time: how do you manage? What calms you? How much time do you need (to prevent or recover)? Vote with your contributions: the more submissions on a subject sent in (from different people), the more likely that that subject will be the theme. Writing on any subject is still welcome, as are ideas for new themes, and artwork. Remember, if you want to see different content in *AU*, the best way to change it is to send something in!

Dear Mr Imp,

I would very much like to thank you even though I do not see the resemblance to my unique alien picture to a uterus.

This drawing came into my head one day and out straight on paper, after going through a troublesome time with my diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

After looking at the pic of the uterus I can see parts which resemble my alien, aptly named Spunky, but if you ask anyone what it is they will all 100% say an alien, I don't think a uterus will spring to mind.

However, thank you for your comment!

Take care,

Matthew Price

a letter in response to Olly

It's a long story . . .

I can't remember how many lessons I had — I'd long lost count — only that I'd had four different instructors and two failed attempts before I passed at the age of 19, around 1990. This was before the theory test was introduced.

My first instructor (who was assigned to me for no better reason than that he'd taught my brother) made me a nervous wreck. A typical blast from him would be, "Didn't you know you were supposed to change down a gear before turning?" which put me on the spot. If I said "Yes" he'd yell "Then why the hell didn't you?" If I said "No" he'd yell "Why the hell didn't you know?" On the thirtieth lesson my mother sat in the back of the car (at the instructor's request) and realised that a change would do me good, so we used the excuse of wanting a female instructor. So I switched, but eventually instructor #2 had to give up driving because of a hysterectomy so I was moved to the man who is now her husband. I didn't take the test until over a year after starting lessons, and despite my instructor opting for the Barnet test route because it was easier than Hendon, I failed. I didn't resume lessons until my second term at St Andrew's Uni, where I took the test twice.

Even after I passed I remained nervous behind the wheel. Things were made worse at my first graduate job, when I had a minor accident driving one of the company's cars. I feel nervous just writing about that incident, because I soon learnt that other people found this inexplicably funny — I guess a lot of humour relies on schadenfreude. There seems to be this belief that once you have passed the test you should feel comfortable driving any model of car, yet I seem to be the exception.

I've never had my own car. In some cities I'm not sure where I would have parked one. It would have been more of an advantage when I worked in Skipton, as the public-transport route to the out-of-town business park was at best tiresome, at worst nightmarish (I'm referring specifically to crossing the A59 on a dark evening and then

finding that the bus drivers couldn't see me to stop). When I lost the job after five months there didn't seem any point in buying a car.

But how do you overcome driving nerves if you don't own a car? Someone once suggested the advanced driving course, but, when I contacted the IAM, I found they expected you to have your own car, otherwise I guess it would be like going for a piano exam without an instrument to practise on. I was further confused when I learnt that RoSPA also does an advanced driving test — which is better?

In 2009 I did Pass Plus, and earned praise from my parents when I next drove their car. Alas, in 2012 as I was driving with my father in the passenger seat I failed to slow down soon enough as I pulled off the motorway and hit the crash barrier on the roundabout. Thanks to the airbags we survived: me with bruising to the knee and clavicle, my poor dad with extensive bruising to the ribcage and hips, although not enough to need hospital treatment. I was charged with driving without due care and attention, but given the chance to avoid the six points on my licence by doing a police-endorsed driving course. I did the course — actually a day workshop comprising both classroom sessions and driving. The latter was a disaster for me — as soon as I got into the driving seat and saw the word "airbag" I panicked. It was as if I were twenty years younger, in a bad way — I felt more nervous than I'd felt since I was a learner, so much so that I could barely sense where the pedals were. I hadn't told the organisers that I had Asperger's — would it have made any difference if I had? Despite all that, I passed the driver alertness course satisfactorily.

Another thing — which may or not be relevant — was that I had dislocated my shoulder in a bike accident five months prior to the car accident. In the former case I braked too sharply, whereas on the slip road it was the reverse scenario. Having previously been a competent cyclist, I have yet to regain the knack.

(Name not printed, as requested)

Dear Goth

Further to Olly's letter in *AU* edition 88:

Congratulations on passing your driving tests! People with AS can have difficulties with this due to anxiety and in particular dyspraxia.

Readers might recall a BBC programme a few years back called *Autistic driving school* which featured Julia Malkin, MBE. Not only does she have the highest level of instruction qualifications, but she has AS herself and specialises in teaching neurodiverse students. She also designed the *Revolutions* driving instruction course specifically for Aspies, which a number of driving schools have rolled out. She can be contacted through Excel Driver Training, exceldia@ntlworld.com, 0116 223 5652.

Best wishes

Neil

Dear Goth,

I am writing in response to Olly (edition 88).

I turned 17 in October and received driving lessons as a gift from my parents. I'm really excited to learn to drive as I feel it's a great way for me to gain some independence. I am also quite nervous about driving though. As I'm sure you can understand, Asperger's can be a bit of a pain when it comes to anxiety. Hopefully it all goes well and I pass everything as quickly as you!

Yours sincerely,

Sam

Resubscription project

notice by the Goth

More of you have received a flier with this magazine asking you to resubscribe. Please respond in one of the ways listed on the flier. People who don't respond will be sent fliers three times, and after that their subscription will end.

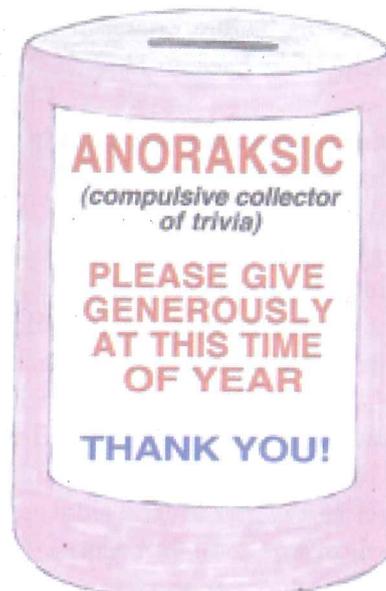
But please don't worry: if you want to continue to receive *AU*, just respond!

If you have not received a flier there is no need to respond, though if it puts your mind at rest, please feel free to let me know you want your subscription to continue.

Dear Goth,

responding to Nathaniel in issue 88, the October edition. Experience of the wider Aspie community, both online and real life, soon shows that we are just as capable of backstabbing as everyone else. We are simply flawed humans, we are not the Tomorrow People or X-Men.

Maurice



Tony

Culture shock

story by Tony

I was lost, asleep, caught in a nightmare, until Professor Andrews rescued me. His treatment was new, radical and no-one else had thought of it, let alone tried it. I was the first successful guinea pig — all the others had “died” or remained unchanged but I was saved. The current was too strong, too weak or the condition of the others was too far gone. After the series of shocks, I started to remember who I was, who I’d been before and then I was slowly able to communicate this to others. “My name is Charles Ward,” I said, stumblingly.

“I used to live in Acacia Avenue, Fulham. I was married with two children, until the illness took me. My family — God no! Were my first victims (I would have cried, had it been physically possible but my condition stopped me).

“It’s alright old man. Steady on. It’s perfectly understandable. The horrors of your previous life,” said the professor.

He was the only one who treated me with kindness. The others in the establishment called me a monster and didn’t trust me.

“Once one of them, always one of them,” they intoned behind my back.

“You just can’t trust them — I wouldn’t turn my back on him for a second.”

I was still a monster, a misfit to them and would revert to type, given half a chance. Maybe they were right — how could I tell? I could be fine one minute and slide back into bad habits in an instant — who knows? Even the professor can’t be sure, which is why I’m monitored so thoroughly. The cameras pan me. Eyes follow my every move. If it wasn’t for the recovered memories of who I was, I might become paranoid.

My beautiful daughters! My wife! How could I do this horrible thing to them? I was a monster alright. A creature not to be trusted. I was an addict of human flesh and the professor had saved me.

They give me insulin and feed me nutrients, intravenously because they say I cannot digest food normally yet. Apparently all the dead flesh is returning to life and I am becoming “human” again. They say the return to conscious awareness is the first stage and that they might be winning this war, if they can turn me back to normality. The professor believes that consciousness is what keeps the animal urges under control and stops me — us in fact — from being condemned to a life of mindless cannibalism, eternally. I hope he is right. He further believes (and the evidence seems to suggest it, strongly) that once you’ve captured the mind and got it in thrall, the body will follow. He says, like criminals and addicts, it’s a question of reprogramming the being. I really hope he is right.

The guards wanted their revenge on me — not for my crimes against my own flesh and blood but for those they had lost to “my kind”. It gave them a sense of closure and of power, to beat the hell out of me. It made little difference to me as I felt nothing and was broken already, in mind and spirit, and as the professor said the body just followed down the mineshaft of terror.

I am not alone here. The others are chained and locked in cells because they have been known to gnaw off their own hands and pull off their own feet to try to escape — such is the effect of their deep hunger. They look at me with pleading eyes — like animals that cannot communicate in any other way. I turn my back on them, glad to no longer be one of their number, sad that they are still trapped in this lifestyle and ashamed that I cannot help these lab rats.

Talking of lab rats, the urge is returning in me. It started with surreptitiously swallowed insects, then rodents, birds if I can catch them, and once a hedgehog. Oh yes: as they learned to trust me, they let me out into the grounds — at first supervised, then quite freely. By this time Andrews had moved on. I was no longer his favourite “pet”, just an old project that he let others monitor. I was still fenced in. I still had cameras aimed at me but by this time I was considered mostly harmless. The smell of rotting flesh that was me had subsided with time, and the effects of various treatments. On top of that people had become acclimatised to my odour. I was the grenade that hadn't gone off.

Now, like a prisoner of war, I searched for a weak point — the spot where the searchlights or cameras missed — and I dug.

I had known I was starting to revert when the Parkinson's-like symptoms started to reappear and I found it hard to kick start my body into normal, human motion. I hid the shuffling gait as best as I could, the creeping catatonia but I knew the condition was returning and that there was no point fighting it.

I saw my people wandering in large, distant herds. I heard the sound of gunfire and explosions as the humans culled them. I longed to join them. I wanted to forget the normality I'd been a part of in the past and rejoined here: the bright-light effect of coming out of a cinema into daylight, the noise, the smells, the sensitivity of touch and above all “taste”. I wanted to forget all of these plus the memories of what I'd done to others, who trusted me to be at least “human”. The wounds of these half-remembered crimes against what I was were just too much to bear. I wanted to slip back into the opulent dark of unknowing. To be without that sharpness of conscience and consciousness was all I longed for. I wanted to forget, big time, and tonight my opportunity came. I scrambled under the wire and got away, joining my brothers and sisters of the flesh. At first they sniffed me, like some new animal but then realised I was still the same underneath. Soon the zombie army marched on, with me in its midst. Sorry professor but I must remain true to my calling as you do yours. You didn't sin against what you were but for me there is no going back and no desire to. Even now the language centre is going and with it my mind.

“Ugh, snarl, grunt.”

Creativity

by David

I always thought I was quite good at taking other people's ideas and modifying them, but not so strong at coming up with my own creative ideas. However, I didn't know why this was.

When a computer software engineer in the 1980s, I took a colleague's database he'd designed from scratch, for keeping a list of his record collection, and changed it to help our team track the software applications we needed to review. As someone who's kept an interest in origami over many years, I've always folded other people's designs — the one “original” design I came up with over a long period, for a kangaroo, was really an amalgamation of various other kangaroos by other authors, that I'd folded. The list goes on: there are probably many other instances similar to these.

But, am I doing myself a disservice here? Am I, can I be creative? Well, of course I can and am, but it's just that up until now I've tended to focus on taking something else, that already exists, and moulding it.

Starting out with a blank piece of paper is never easy for me, and I always say 95% of the effort is in the re-drafting, the re-finishing, changes, alterations, in order to get the finished article.

After I was diagnosed with Asperger's about three years ago, and then subsequently started to get help, this “creativity” aspect then started to make a bit more sense, and I could start to make sense of the past a bit more.

The premature one

story by Mark

Metaphors can be deadly.

Karen, a beautiful girl, born at 27 weeks to Margo and Dave, suffered a gargantuan brain haemorrhage at four days old. Hydrocephalus made it more severe.

Most autistic people struggle with loud noises, but for her it was metaphors.

Her helper, Nick's, diary goes like this:

WARNING: as this is a novel written by someone with particularly mild autism, there are some scenes people with no (or mild) autism may find pretty shocking.

This is set in a Special Emotional Needs (not Special Educational Needs) school.

Monday 7 September (Week A) Geography: Mr Galloway (MGY) F9 0845-0945

Great work on China. Hwk: Research Great Wall.

Tech: Mr Kingsley (CK) D10

Mr Kingsley in meeting with head of Art, Mrs Glenn, so took her into S3, where we did some tech games 'n' stuff.

Break 1045-1115
On computers

Maths: Miss Longton (KLN) G6

Algebra, Pythagoras' theorem. No hwk

Law: Mr Brown: (RBR) J2. In F6 due to law exams.

French: Mrs Fleming (AF) F14: Revise for test on Wed.

Magnifique. Spiffing Stuff.

Tuesday 8 September
Art: Mrs Jones: (CJN) Van Gogh and Dutch painters. Research Van Gogh's paintings.

English: USSR with Mr Lloyd (PLD) in L6

Break.

History: Miss Garrett: (JGA) T10: Iron Age.

Worked with Tom and Kate.

Law: Mr Brown: J2 Did criminal law: (Law J1-J5).

Sir shouting at chatty girl, who's come in from J4, saying "I will bite your head off," not knowing Karen has severe-ish Asperger syndrome. She cried for a while, (she didn't stop till 30 mins after I escorted her to S3), not because of him shouting, but because he used a metaphor that made her imagine a cannibal. (At start of lesson, 1217-1219)

I took her to law office (J3 annexe), and reassured her. 5 mins later, I took her to S3 to play on computer. At least, by next law lesson (Friday 5), Sir will have noticed her ASD.

Dance: Mrs Richards (SRI) G10

German waltzes. No hwk (obviously)

Dear Nick,
I talked to Karen

re Lesson 4 and metaphors, she'll be fine next time she sees Sir. PS: She still couldn't get over by 1900, after Mum and I had had a conversation with her, Lorraine (Karen's sister).

Wed 9 September
Politics: PM's PR1 KKN (Mr Kenwright).

Français Mrs Fleming F14

36/36 on test level 6b.

Maths KLN: Perfect numbers

Tech: Sir in This time round. Moneyboxes.

English: WB Yeats.

Days when in S3: 7 Sep Lesson 2 (Sir not in).

8 Sep Lesson 4 (Karen inconsolably upset by "gruesome" metaphor (GM).

10 Sep Lesson 1 (PE).

12 Sep Lesson 5 (PE).

15 Sep Lessons 1+2
(double PE).

19 Sep Lesson 4
(Maths: Miss not in).
2nd ½ Autumn term
(Winter term).

Tuesday 27 Oct
Maths: Miss off sick.

Mon 16 Nov See
8 Sep for details.
Mrs Johnson talked
about “bull and bear
markets”, which
Karen thought was
a bazaar of intense
animal cruelty.

17 Dec Lessons 3+4:
Early finish @ 1230

Tuesday 25 January
See 8 Sep. Sir said
he had an “axe to
grind”, Karen’s brain
conjured up images of
executions.

13-21 Feb Half term.

29 Mar See 8 Sep,
Miss said, “I don’t
mind being thrown
in the deep end.”
This caused Karen
immense distress,
because she thought
the trainee was
drowning.

3-18 Apr Easter.

19 Apr Sir not in.

26 Apr Me on college
interview, different
LSA.

12 May See 8 Sep.
Music *Ain’t no love in
the heart of the city* (rock).
Took Karen into S3
after This made her
very upset.

23 May Finish.

2 June PE.

30 June See 8 Sep.
Music *Bridge over
troubled water*. Karen
conjured up a lone
traveller, standing
on a weak bridge
in a monsoon. She
thought the traveller
would drown.

18 July Early Finish
@ 1230. Last 2
lessons, both PE.

18 July Dear Nick,
I mentioned to
Mum about getting an
autism assistance dog
for Karen.

Hope you have
a spiffing summer
holiday! Over the
phone, I’ve talked
about this to Sandra,
Lorraine.

20 July It’s pretty
stifling, (26C). The
autism dogs all have
purple harnesses, as
opposed to green
ones for guide dogs.

“The day has
arrived for us to get
an autism assistance
dog for you, Karen,”
Lorraine said. At

0900, they drove to
see Sandra, the chief
trainer of autism-
assistance dogs.

“Hi everybody,
I’m Sandra, chief
autism-dog trainer.

80% of our dogs
are golden retrievers,
the rest black
Labradors. Let’s get
to know a few.

I teach the dogs
how to respond to
certain behaviours.”

Sandra says these
commands, saying a
dog’s name first:

“Millie, alert!”

“Millie, speak!”
(Millie barks.)

21 July Back again, to
choose which dog to
take.

By 1100, there is a
debate on which one
to choose.

Dave wants
Millie to be Karen’s
assistance dog, but
Lorraine wants Anya
to be Karen’s ASD
assistance dog, as
does Margo (Karen’s
mum), and Karen
herself.

Near-unanimous
vote: Anya becomes
Karen’s assistance
dog. (Anya barks
excitedly).

Dave says: “How
the heck will we get
a 55-pound Golden
Retriever into the
back seat? God
knows how that’ll
happen!”

Dear Nick,

before Kara
(Karen has renamed
the assistance dog
Kara) Karen only
talked to me, Dave
and Lorraine, (that
is, immediate family,
including her nan
and grandad), and
never really talked to
her cousins etc. She
never understood
metaphors and would
have a panic attack
if we watched a
Catchphrase double bill
at 3 pm on a weekend
or 4 pm on a weekday,
or *Total wipeout*, which
we think is fun,
but Karen saw it as
torture. Karen could
only say about fifty-
ish words, (she was
so brain-damaged it
took her 8 years to say
her first words, but
she has no physical
disabilities, only
autism) now she can
say 16,000-odd of
them, and only finds
about 50 of them
(usually scientific)
difficult to pronounce
(eg. haemoglobin). (So
do Dave and I, but
Lorraine is the science
buff.)

Margo.

a story (continued)

First week:
Tuesday 22 to Sunday
27.

22 July Today, bearing in mind what Sandra said about Anya being the sweetest-tempered ASD dog in the village, we'll call her Kara, meaning "sweet": she has all the necessary stuff, right temperament, etc., to become an ASD assistance dog.

Phone call @ 1 pm-ish on Tuesday saying, "This is for you, Karen, to tell you the spiffing news that . . . Kara has been placed as a permanent family member, although she's not a pet.

"YESSSSSSSS!"
Karen and Marie said. "Spiffing news!"
Lorraine and Dave said.

(Cara barks happily, wags her long, heavily feathered tail.)

Wed 23 July "Double *Catchphrase* at 3 pm on Challenge TV, let's see how Karen fares."

"If she has a panic attack, we'll tell Kara to find her," says Lorraine.

2:59 pm "Okay, Mum, I'm switching on to Channel 46."

I'll stay here for 5 minutes, just to make absolutely sure nothing upsets Karen.

Roy Walker says "What's this?"

"Keeping your eyes peeled?" buzzes in Angela.

"You're right!"
(Hah-hauh- haaaaauh)

"Kara, find Karen!"

Kara rushes upstairs, and sees Karen in the extension. She barks a high-pitched bark that sounds a bit more like a 14-inch, 10-kg cocker spaniel than a 21-inch, 25-kg golden retriever.

"YESSSSSSSS!"

"Good girl, Kara! You found Karen! You deserve a Baker's treat!"

Ishy enough though, there was a Baker's advert on at 3:15, just 2 minutes after Kara rushed up to find Karen in the extension . . . on her Nintendo Mario Kart 3!

Dave said, "Karen's such a pro at this; she can avoid being squeeshed by a blue shell or thwomp!"

Karen's first night with Kara tonight. Karen has an alarm, usually set for 6:50-ish every morning.

"How was your first night with Kara?"

"Magnifique."
Karen said.

A noticeable bond between Karen and Kara formed and, on Thursday, Karen took Kara out for a walk in the park, a few streets away. Karen's life has improved dramatically.

29 July This is the first day Karen starts making friends with neighbours.

We'll go for a Chinese meal to Beijing Palace. This is one restaurant where autism assistance dogs are allowed.

2 Sep Karen can actually bring her dog into school with her from tomorrow (Wednesday).

19 Sep A meal out at Tokyo Temple Japanese restaurant, because this is the first day Karen has understood advanced body language.

17 Nov Another meal out, to celebrate, (are you guessing? No, not a birthday but another autism milestone) because of Karen making eye contact for the first time.

3 Dec For the first time in 11 years, we can now switch our Christmas lights on without upsetting Karen. This is all because of autism-dog heroine Kara.

4 Dec We get the Santas out and stuff. We make mince pies, and leave Kara pieces of turkey in her bowl.

25 Dec Last year, Karen only got a few presents, but now she has more than 15.



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(contact information for *AU* is on page 2 and again on page 20)

- 1) *Asperger United* is funded by the NAS and readers' donations, and is independent of the NAS. Although it is called "*Asperger United*" it aims to be for the whole of the (reading) autism spectrum. That is, the concerns and joys of any autistic subscriber can be printed, not just Asperger's.
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- 15) Although each issue is themed, submissions on any subject are welcome. Only some of the letters and articles in each issue will follow the theme. All submissions may be edited, especially for privacy, libel, and for fitting the space available.

Vimto vampires

by Daniel

I'll stand by as Vimto vampires bleed us through

Our fizz and spark will not fool

I'll stay with you through light and dark

And when the moon is full

The wolves will howl

Then bark

We'll be in bubbles

But they will burst

As the vampires quench their thirst

We will lie dead before the final dawn

The last act

Blooded and torn

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