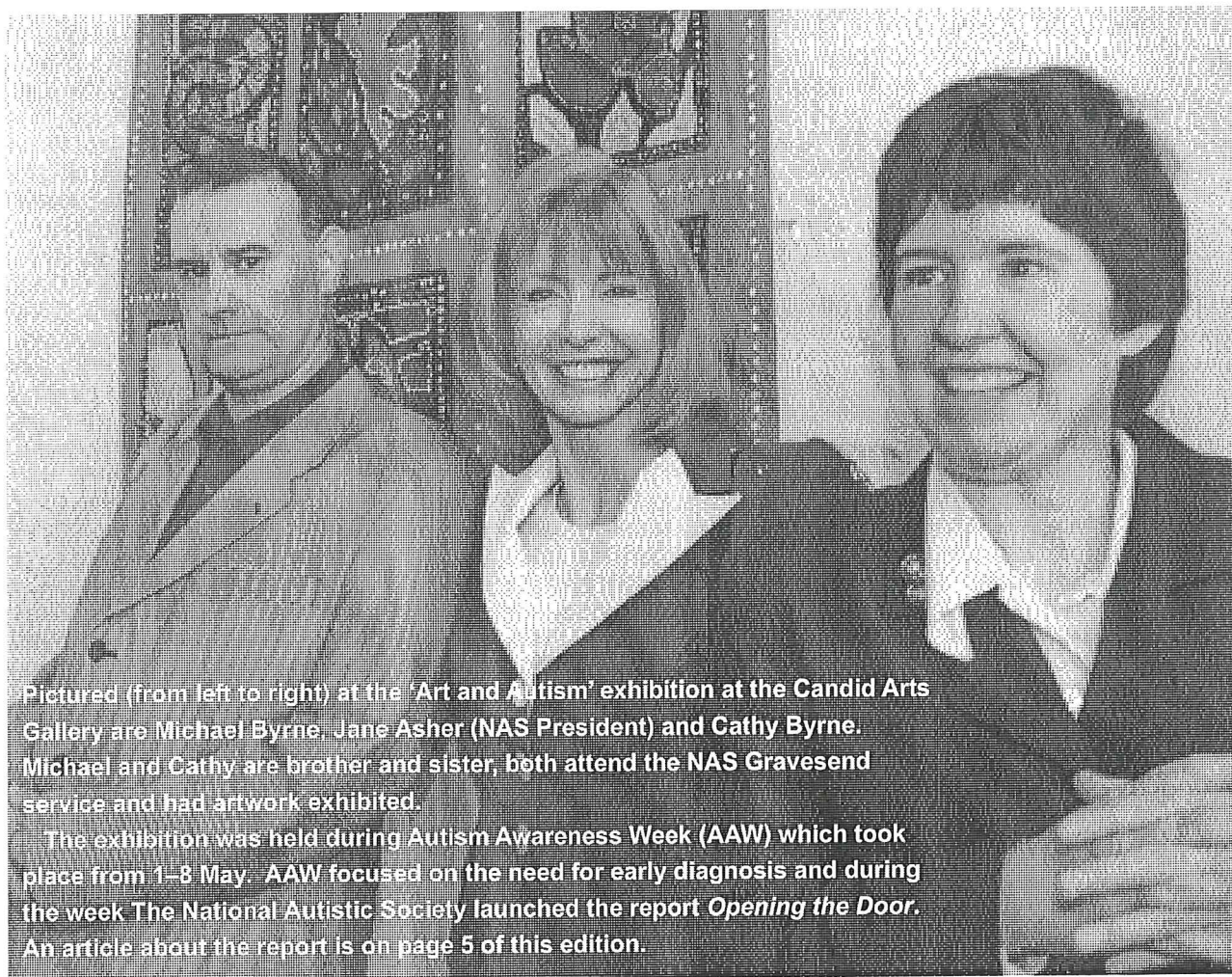


Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

united Asperger

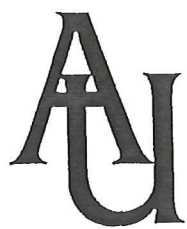
Edition **20** Summer 1999

Special diagnosis edition



Pictured (from left to right) at the 'Art and Autism' exhibition at the Candid Arts Gallery are Michael Byrne, Jane Asher (NAS President) and Cathy Byrne. Michael and Cathy are brother and sister, both attend the NAS Gravesend service and had artwork exhibited.

The exhibition was held during Autism Awareness Week (AAW) which took place from 1-8 May. AAW focused on the need for early diagnosis and during the week The National Autistic Society launched the report *Opening the Door*. An article about the report is on page 5 of this edition.



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

Asperger United is produced by an editorial group consisting of:

Editor John Joyce

Sub-Editor Martin Coppola

Assisted by Pam Yates, The Maudsley Hospital's Home Based Team for Autistic Individuals

Additional support from The National Autistic Society

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Thank you to George Cox who kindly produced the illustrations included in the Pen Pal Network section.

Thank you to Graeme Lawson for producing the 'AU' logo.

Please note that the views expressed in Asperger United are not necessarily those of the Editors, The National Autistic Society or those involved the publication of the newsletter.

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the second edition of your newsletter for 1999. This edition is a special on diagnosis. Autism Awareness Week took place in May this year and focused on the need for early diagnosis. Throughout this edition there is a focus on 'diagnosis' — many of you sent in contributions and I thank you for these. Please do send in contributions for the next edition, including those about your experiences at school.

As for me, I have been continuing my course in French, even though I failed the written part of last year's exam and was thereby held to have failed the whole course. I will therefore be attending another residential school in Caen this summer before going to Lourdes. I still hope to be able to undertake further courses in order to complete a BA degree, which I would like to obtain before retirement from my work. I also await the findings of a promotion board who interviewed me last November. The promotion would involve responsibility for assessment of my colleagues' performances as well as doing a reasonable job myself.

Enough about me. Hope we hear what some of you have been

doing since the last magazine was published. Maybe some of you recall the conference held at The Maudsley Hospital eighteen months ago and could arrange for similar ones to be held in your region, and let Asperger United know about them, allowing people from the South of England to attend if they wish.

I received a request from Association Espoir for assistance in getting educational aids for schools for young people (5–18) with autism, which have already been established in the Republic of Niger (not Nigeria) in West Africa. Basic school materials, such as pens, pencils, exercise books, chalk, writing slates and blackboards are required.

Please continue to send your articles of interest — let us know your successes with penpals, send artwork, poetry, even gardening and cookery tips!

Happy reading

Your Editor, John Joyce

Contributions needed for the next edition of Asperger United

We have received an excellent story from Vanessa Dickinson, about her experiences at school, which we will be publishing in the next edition. Vanessa's story deals with the problems she encountered at school — such as bullying and being left out — which were hard to deal with. An extract from the story reads:

"Another day of torment, being shoved, kicked and called names. Why did they pick on me I wonder, perhaps 'cause I'm an easy target..."

Unfortunately Vanessa's experiences are all too common, as many adults with autism and Asperger syndrome were bullied at school. To accompany Vanessa's story we would like you to write about your experiences of school — whether positive or negative — and about how these experiences have affected the way you are now.

Please send all contributions to Asperger United, The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.

You can now send contributions via email to asp.utd@nas.org.uk

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“ Most of us knew from an early age that we were different from other children, but did not know that we had a definite disability... ”

“ All of my life I have struggled to be normal. It was a great relief to realise that my failure to be like everyone else was not my fault... ”

What does it mean to have a diagnosis?

Most of us knew from an early age that we were different from other children, but did not know that we had a definite disability.

Some people might find life easier without diagnosis and a label. If one is labelled one can face discrimination in spite of the new Disability Discrimination Act which is intended to prevent unjustified discrimination. If you have the label 'Asperger syndrome', it would NOT count as unjustified discrimination to refuse you any job dealing with the public because the leaflets say we are supposed to have communication difficulties. In this way one would be barred from many desirable jobs such as working in a library. Anyone with the label of Asperger syndrome might be considered to need support at work even if there is no need to have it in their particular case. If you are

diagnosed as a small child with Asperger syndrome you could be sent to a special school and be denied a proper education when you could have managed in a main stream school. Education in NOT covered under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Having said all that, it can be useful to have a diagnosis if one needs extra help. I got a six month contract in the House of Commons arranged by another agency which also supported me at work. If people think you just have a difficult personality, then *Prospects* and other agencies will not support you at work. I am also sure that there are some very successful people who, if they saw an expert, would be diagnosed with some mental problem or emotional problem. They could then be prevented from holding positions of power where they can do untold harm. *David Shamash*

Diagnosis on the agenda

The aim of a national conference on Asperger syndrome, on the 7th October at Regent's College in London, is to redress the deficit in knowledge of this complex disorder by bringing together professionals from all fields with expertise in this area.

The event will address diagnostic and management issues, looking beyond childhood, and focusing on adults with Asperger syndrome and high functioning autism.

The event will feature presentations from Dr Anthony Bailey, Professor Pat Howlin, Dr Amita Shah, a parent's perspective from Professor Dickinson and the experiences of a panel of adults with Asperger syndrome or high functioning autism.

For further information contact: Mole Conferences on 01273 242 635 or Pavilion Publishing on 01273 623 222.

How I came to be diagnosed

I had suspected for years that there was something that I did not know about myself, apart from what I saw as my main problem, paranoid schizophrenia, an illness for which I had been hospitalised five times. I had asked a nurse if he thought I may be autistic but he just laughed and said "no".

Ten years later I saw a programme about autistic children on the television, and I realised that they were like me. Looking in the local paper I saw the self-help phonelines and through The National Autistic Society I got to see a psychologist, who after umpteen tests confirmed my self diagnosis.

At first I was euphoric but this soon wore off, leaving me eventually rather depressed and frustrated. I bought literature from The National Autistic Society in London, which I joined, and I became aware of myself being in some ways handicapped. All of my life I have struggled to be normal. It was a great relief to realise that my failure to be like everyone else was not my fault. *George*

New leaflet

Launched during Autism Awareness Week, the leaflet *What next? Moving on from diagnosis* is now available from The National Autistic Society at 25p each. Tel 0171 903 3595.

“ The story does not begin until around the end of 1988 when I turned 16 because my life prior to that was so horrendous and traumatic that my mind has blacked out most of my childhood memories ... I was diagnosed when I was 15 ”

My life with Asperger syndrome

The story does not begin until around the end of 1988 when I turned 16 because my life prior to that was so horrendous and traumatic that my mind has blacked out most of my childhood memories.

I was diagnosed when I was 15, but unfortunately, at the time I went to live with my father and stepmother who adamantly denied I had anything of the sort. Although I deeply resent them for doing so, I have to say that on the whole I was almost immediately infinitely happier living with them than I had been with my mother beforehand. I achieved a lot when I was with them — good GCSE's, straight A's at 'A' Level and a place at Cambridge University to read Natural Sciences. I did well at Cambridge, but because of what my Dad and stepmum had said, I did not believe that I had Asperger syndrome. I became seriously depressed because I did not make any friends and suffered a severe case of unrequited love with a girl called Pippa. Eventually I managed to break out of my shell and found a good

friend in a lad called Scott. However, despite having got over her once before, I fell in love with Pippa again. Combined with numerous other stresses this resulted in me having a nervous breakdown during my finals. I was nevertheless given an aegrotat and awarded my honours degree.

By this time, I was beginning to come to terms with the fact that I did have Asperger syndrome. Whereas most people find being diagnosed in the first place a huge relief, in my case the huge relief came when I found out for myself that I had the condition some 7 years after I was originally diagnosed.

I then moved back to my mother's. I was very much looking forward to moving out when my Mum forced me to move out before I was ready. I found myself a nice studio flat (where I still live today) but got stuck in a job which was clearly unsuitable but which I simply could not afford to give up. This led me to crack up again and I went into a psychiatric hospital. It took me the best part of 1997 to recover.

I now feel that I have overcome most of the difficulties faced by people like me. I have got everything I could hope for in life apart from a girl to share it with and on the whole consider Asperger syndrome to be a blessing rather than a curse. Nowadays I don't have too much difficulty making friends and have a brilliant social life. I still feel uncomfortable meeting new people but when I explain to them about my condition I usually find that they accept me the way I am. I believe I have found a unique way of expressing my unspoken feelings through karaoke and feel that discovering this as a means of letting out my feelings is my biggest achievement of all time.

I still have difficulty approaching girls and finding suitable work. I have no problems with menial jobs which are well structured, but all the jobs I have tried relating to my science degree have seriously stressed me out, because of the lack of structure, routine and clearcut instructions.

Peter Bibby

Opening the door report

The *Opening the door* report, launched by The National Autistic Society during Autism Awareness Week, stressed the need for early diagnosis but revealed that 40% of parents questioned waited more than three years to gain a diagnosis for their child; 10% of them waiting 10 years or more. Obtaining a diagnosis is often a

very difficult and convoluted process.

Also stressed within the report was that health professionals provide families with inadequate support and assessments of how the disability will affect a person.

Difficulties with getting a diagnosis and a good assessment are not related solely to the parents of young children,

but also to adults. Whatever the diagnosis — whether the person is two or 20 years old — it is needed so that the right type of services and support can be accessed, to improve the lives of people with autistic spectrum disorders who may need specialised pre-school help and education, support in finding employment and the benefits they have a right to.



“ If you are reading this letter, I am simply writing to say that you are not alone in this world ”

Many symptoms the same

Dear *Asperger United*,

I was very interested in the feature printed in Issue 19 about Debbie Hudson's account of what it feels like to be autistic.

I am twenty six years of age and was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome by Dr Lesley, a child psychiatrist who worked at Booth Hall Childrens Hospital. I was eleven at the time. Although my disability was recognised at an early age I still had a very difficult childhood, and I can understand the pain and suffering that Debbie went through. In fact I was quite amazed when I realised that

many of the symptoms included in the list are exactly the same as mine, particularly the ones about being a great reader, having a good memory for first events and not being able to cope with crowds.

So Debbie, if you are reading this letter, I am simply writing to say that you are not alone in this world. I understand that this is not a pen-pal letter, but if you would like to get in touch with me, then please feel free. I am always willing to share your problems.

Rebecca Radcliffe.

Does anyone else have these problems?

Dear *Asperger United*,

As a person who has no definite diagnosis except a vague 'possible autistic traits', I wondered if any other autistic / Asperger's people have problems with any of the following. First, self-inflicted injuries like bruises, cuts, burns, scratching/gouging skin, or hitting their bodies. My cuts heal very fast, without infections, but I have other scars, larger and redder than they should be. Second, difficulty seeing on bright days and in neon lighting. Bright light makes me panic with overload and makes my eyes water badly. Third, a low level alpha rhythm in the brain, which can cause

epilepsy from flickering lights, watching TV resulting in migraines, sickness and black outs. Fourth, has anyone been helped by wearing coloured glasses?

I hope you will print this letter so people can write to me. I will try to answer all letters and maybe become a penpal to some of the respondents.

Acting
Unusually
To
Incorporate
Senseless
Meanings

Peace and harmony,
Joanna Lavender.

Reply from the editors

Dear Joanna

Thank you for your letter and poems. I hope you find the articles under Asperger Syndrome helpful. Perhaps Rebecca's letter opposite will help you to realise that you are not alone with your feelings.

How, why and who started *Asperger United* ?

Dear *Asperger United*,

My name is Anna Belinda Cohen, when I was eighteen I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. At that time, I came up with the name 'Asperger United' for the newsletter, which had just started up.

I would be interested to know how, why

and who started the magazine which is still going strong today.

I am sure other people would be interested in this and, maybe with the 21st century just round the corner, this should be an article in your next issue.

Yours sincerely,
Anna Cohen

Reply from editor

As a founder member you may not have realised that your naming of the newsletter started it all!! It has lasted since you were a regular at the Maudsley Social Skills Group and will last for as long as I am able to carry it on!!



We have much to offer

Dear *Asperger United*,

Over the last couple of years there have been television documentaries dealing with autism and Asperger syndrome. When I saw these I realised that I had a lot in common with those people suffering from Asperger's, even though our lives may be different in many ways. It was a tremendous relief to find that I was not completely alone and that there were other people who had similar experiences to my own.

There must be many people like me who have a mild form of Asperger's and have led a fairly 'normal' sort of life.

I am 55 years old and am now retired from my work in education. I hope to say more about my self in some later edition

of the newsletter.

As you might expect my life has had its shares of ups and downs, successes and failures. Anyhow more of that later.

I believe that people with Asperger's have a great deal to offer one another and to society as a whole. We do not need to apologise for our existence, we have every right to be here.

I now live in Luton, although I was born in Lancashire and worked for a number of years in the Midlands. My interests include music (mainly classical), contemporary transport issues, walking and cycling. I am a practising Christian but certainly not a religious fanatic. I would be very happy to hear from

“ It was a tremendous relief to find that I was not completely alone and that there were other people who had similar experiences to my own ”

anyone, of any age, particularly if they live in this area.

Yours sincerely
Jim Ashworth

Reply from the editors

Thank you for your article. I hope you will contribute more to the future editions.

The fight for acceptance and the right to be unacceptable

I am a 25 year old woman who has autistic tendencies and problems with anorexia and self-inflicted injury. I am not typical of the autistic person who harms his/her self as I do it consciously and with intent because of the self-hatred I feel at my social inability. All my energies go into pretending to be 'normal' in overwhelming circumstances.

To me, normal levels of lighting are glaringly bright, sounds agonisingly loud, gentle touch is harsh and painful, and smells (perfume, air-fresheners...) cloying and choking. But at the same time you could shout in my ear and I might not

notice. I injure myself partly to bridge the gap between myself and 'the world' as though my skin is a cage I carry around with me that prevents me from reaching out and other people from reaching in.

My scars are like a partly decipherable language in which I feel safe to speak the language of autism - the stereotyped movements which calm and amuse me but to 'normal' people are just as puzzling as self-injury - so it is hardly surprising that I have part-invented and part-borrowed a secret language of my own. As an autistic, some people 'make allowances' for me, while others go out of their way to pre-

tend they see nothing and a very few are downright unkind. Is it surprising in such circumstances that I am forever trying to be what I am not? The world of the autistic - my world - can be very beautiful, absorbing and wonderful, but the non-autistics insist on dragging me back to their 'reality', not caring about how miserable this makes a person.

I wish you all what I would like for myself: peace, caring, and space to be who you are.

Love J.

“ I had no diagnosis of the underlying problem
until three years ago ”

My life with Asperger syndrome

My name is Robin Oliver and I am 49 years old. I have Asperger syndrome. This is an account of my life, my problems and the attempts at diagnosis and treatment.

I experienced severe psychological problems from a very early age, including rocking and repetitive movements. I attended an ordinary school, but had many difficulties in coping, was emotionally very insecure and was very unhappy. I also suffered from extreme anxiety, and in my teenage years, developed obsessions about the law, thinking that I either had done, or would do terrible things to other people.

At the age of 17, I left school after gaining four A Levels and next year read mathematics at University College London. However, I felt extremely anxious, particularly about World affairs, and such anxiety made consistent study impossible and I failed my examinations at the end of my first year. I had various treatments and therapies and restarted university after a year's absence. This time I was successful and finally graduated in 1973. After working at the Church Commissioner's for nearly two years, I returned to University College London and gained a Postgraduate diploma in Statistics. In September 1976, I started work as an Assistant Statistician. In November 1977, I passed the tests of the Civil Service Selection Board and became an established Assistant Statistician in the Civil Service. My annual report markings,

satisfactory to begin with, began to deteriorate and in one post became definitely unsatisfactory.

Problems included producing output on time, coping with pressure and organising input from a large number of sources. I was re-graded to a lower grade in 1986, since then I have been working in my present post dealing with housing statistics for what is now the Department or the Environment, Transport and the Regions. My annual report markings have always been satisfactory in my present post. My present work involves providing a data analysis and tabulation service from computer databases of household interview surveys of housing.

All this time, the psychological problems have continued. In addition to the extreme anxiety, which is still a serious problem, I also suffer from feelings of anger, tiredness and tension and am prone to excessive checking. I still have some difficulties in relations to other people although over the years this problem has greatly lessened.

I had no diagnosis of the underlying problem until three years ago. I, and members of my family, had heard and read about Asperger syndrome and my general practitioner sent me to Dr (now Professor) Patricia Howlin, a clinical psychologist, who diagnosed me as having Asperger syndrome. Dr Howlin suggested I go to a social skills group which meets once a month, then at the Maudsley Hospital, now at The National Autistic

Society's head office. I have been attending these for nearly three years, and have found it extremely helpful. Both the Social Skills Group and this magazine have led to my making new friends.

I also got in touch with Prospects, a supported employment service for people with autism and Asperger syndrome. They suggested to my line manager and me that they should supply a support worker to be with me at work to help me to perform to my full potential. The support started about two years ago for half a day per week, and is still continuing but reduced to about two hours every month. Although the benefits have not been dramatic, the support has been very useful, benefits including less wasted time, better organisation and a general improvement in working practices. The support workers from Prospects have given me some specific advice, such as noting the body language of others and tackling difficult or unwelcome tasks instead of putting them off.

Since 1978, I have lived on my own in a flat in Wimbledon that I own. I hope to move to Hampton, where I would like to buy a house, I have started to go places with a befriender who has volunteered under the NAS's befriending scheme. We have been to see the film 'Shakespeare in Love'. I am appearing later in the year on the ITV programme 'Up Close and Personal' in a programme dealing with autism and Asperger syndrome.

Robin Oliver

Anne Wheeler writes about being diagnosed

I was diagnosed quite late, in 1996. I am 35 now and being diagnosed has made a huge difference to my life. My childhood was difficult due to stress at home and parents who were not into relating to their children and because I passed enough exams easily I did not upset the applecart. My interests were insects, animals and fossils which I spent a great deal of time collecting and later on I became very interested in phone codes and number patterns. I coped socially by having very dogmatic religious views, partly from my parents, and having a cast-iron viewpoint gave me a container when I didn't have any other way of coping and I could quote chapter and verse but not interact socially very easily. I left home at 18 and went to a polytechnic to study social sciences but dropped out as I couldn't handle it and studied law instead as it was more factual. I passed the exams easily but had a breakdown during my time there for a number of reasons.

I found tutorial discussions almost impossible but my good memory always got me through exams. When I left I travelled for a while and met people who said I needed help and they didn't believe in my religious ideas and I realised that my way of life didn't hold up in the wider world. So I signed off from dogmatic Christianity and my life structure crashed down. I did not know then how to go about work and knew I could not work as a lawyer although I didn't know why. I did temporary jobs, mostly not working out, and sometimes I was asked to leave on the first day, but jobs involving making lists, updating systems, and filing, I always did so accurately and quickly that people were astonished. Interviews

did not go so well as I asked questions about how the interviewer got to work and about lunch instead of about the job.

My first real job was in a publishing company, a lovely firm with lovely people, but sadly it didn't work out as I was only interested in the filing and did not see the wider picture of book production. Deadlines came and went and I was blissfully unaware, and was asked to leave. I temped again and had therapy, as since 1989, I suffered from severe depression and anxiety, as well as behaviour problems. A therapist said that I seemed autistic.

Ages before I had seen a programme on television about an autistic girl on a swing and knew that I was like her, but didn't connect it to the outside world. I did not connect what the therapist had said to this either, but a few years later, when I was undergoing NHS treatment with a psychologist, I read an article about Donna Williams and it clicked between my inside and my outside worlds that this was me too. I showed it to the psychologist and he said that it fitted and my G.P. referred me to a local assessor, but the assessor said that I had obsessive compulsive disorder and not autism. It was difficult because I knew then about The National Autistic Society and about Prospects and I knew that Autism had explained my pattern of relating to the outside world. It seemed it would stop there even though the assessor had no idea about the autistic spectrum and only knew about severe autism; but another GP in the practice who was quite aware of things also thought autism was my category and I got a referral to Dr Howlin.

Because of stresses in my family, my

“ I was diagnosed quite late, in 1996. I am 35 now and being diagnosed has made a huge difference to my life ”

parents were not involved in the process but after a chat with Dr Howlin, she said that I had Asperger syndrome, but had learned ways of coping in order to get by. I was very relieved to be diagnosed. Then I joined Prospects and got a job as a medical secretary with a support worker from Prospects, but it did not work out because I was very stressed and was becoming unwell again, and I did not know how to communicate this. I wanted to leave my job and work somewhere more creative but in the end I was overtaken by stress and ended up in the hospital for three months. Since then I have been doing voluntary gardening work, one day in the community garden working with delightful people, and one day with an organisation that does shopping and gardening for old people. It is all local so I can walk which takes away a lot of stress and it is enabling me to practice humanity in helping people and dealing with different situations without the stress of being in a paid job.

I say that I have Asperger syndrome on the application forms and that I like doing routine work, like weeding, and I find that if I am up front about what are my strengths and weaknesses then it saves hassle later on. I am still in contact with Prospects though I am doing voluntary work and it helps me to get a perspective. There have been two times

continued on page 10 >>

>> continued from page 9

when I went to an old person's house and they were very strong people and quite demanding and I put my hood up and turned my back to cut out the sensory overload I was getting and later we had to discuss it and it is very good experience for me to discuss a situation instead of disappearing.

Since my time in hospital I have developed a lot as a person and felt that life is not all about facts and figures as I thought, but about attitude and being a part of humanity and participating in a give or take way. I have been at the Maudsley for a year seeing a behaviour therapist, and she has helped me greatly in becoming a more integrated person and having a way of life I can maintain. My behaviour disorders have been minimised, though my autistic habits of animals and numbers remain, I am also interested in people and emotional life. I am very interested in how autistic people can develop and break through barriers. I feel I am a very different person to a few years ago, yet I still have Asperger syndrome and expect to always have the bare bones of this. It is a source of great interest to me how much a diagnosis is a comfortable armchair of relief, and that it gives a reason for the difficulties us autistics have been through, and how a stepping stone to increase awareness and overturn some of these difficulties. *Anne Wheeler*

What Are The Rules?

Even though I know you
I don't know why
You do what you do
Or how
To be 'normal' like you.

Basics

Is where we begin from
But you complicate things.

I can do simple things
But not natural ones
I get confused
"who are you?"
"how d'ya do?"
don't get more complex than that
as I'm out to lunch

permanently
except glimmers of me
but I am not me
senseless? Yes!
On the lunatic express
Guess what?
We've arrived
And we're back where we started from!
Back to basics: a hug's a start.

Autism

Kanner's syndrome:
Contained in a brass box
With slits
Through which to peer out and make
sense of 'the world'
Or poke through a finger or toe
In an attempt to show yourself.
You can't get out
They can't get in.

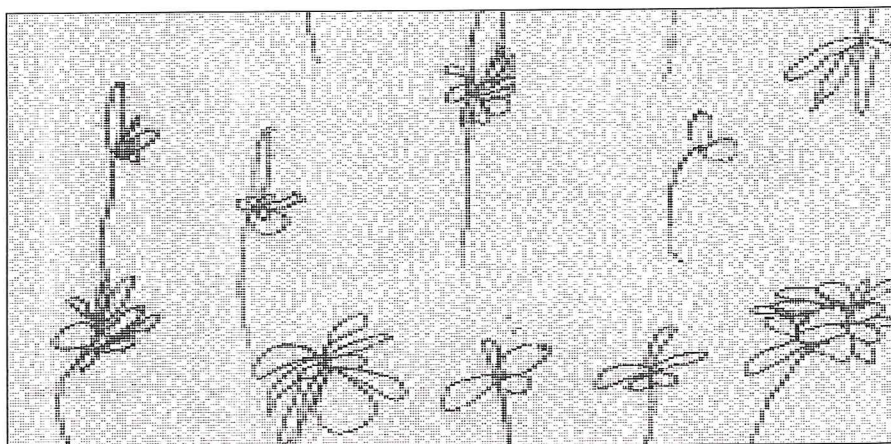
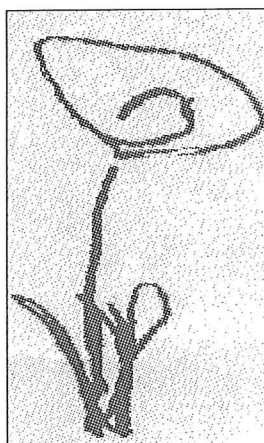
Asperger syndrome

Locked in a cage
With bars vertical, horizontal or both
You're separate, different
And you can see enough to know it
You can learn
To reach out between the bars
Perhaps even bend them a little
But always you're snapped back
And enclosed once again.

You can't stay out
You can't let them in.

"Autism" means "Self" - RUBBISH!
Autism means trapped.

Poems by Joanna Lavender



That Room

In the back room of Robin's house I have looked out onto the vista of trees and a few patches of sky.

As the hazy blue wrapped around the leafy branches fades into yellow and orange it's another midsummer sunset — it is mainly summer evenings spent here.

As the sun sets and the television seems to grow brighter a melancholy array of faded hues precursors yet another holiday. In the middle of a film with a fading dusk my thoughts once again are transported to another climate, and all that has gone before seems so distant, five years in this room, five years in my development and different concepts as well as destinations for every summer evening each year here.

1994 was the far east, and a vivid sense of travel, horror films set in Chicago, and sunsets in an urban metropolis. 1995 is not so vivid, and I struggle to recall any particular emotions that year, 1996, to Ibiza and that dry, hot summer. Maybe the sunset was less beautiful that year or more convoluted, the music at that time stands out more than any sight, and the tune of only you characterises this period for me.

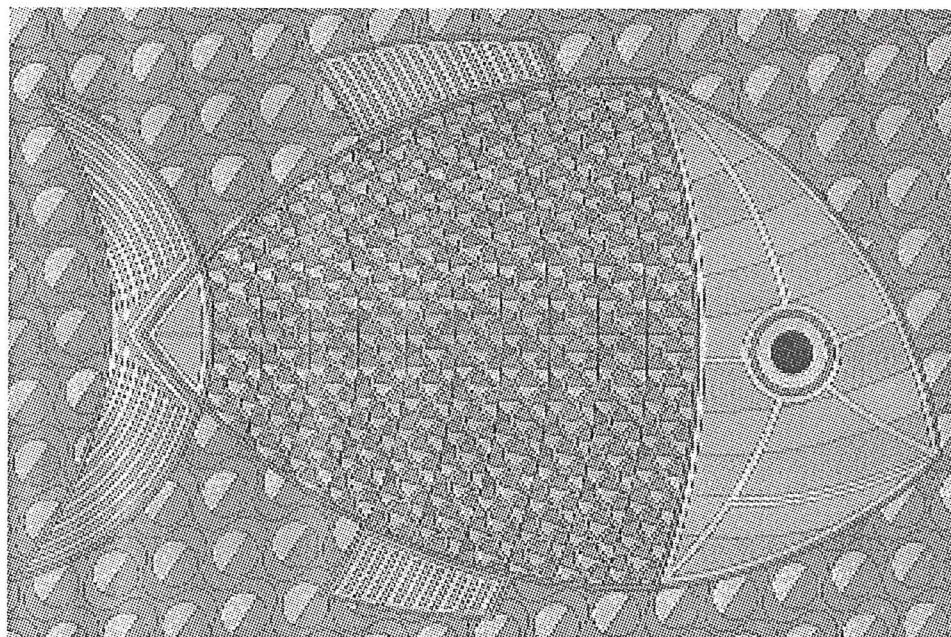
I didn't go abroad in 1997 and we saw the same film we saw in 1994. There was a more powerful sense of England that year of the ocean around us and although I don't recall many beautiful sunsets in that room that year, England's fickle beauty still drew many emotions.

1998 was distinct, and the destructive effects of a hangover clouded any time looking out of the window in that room.

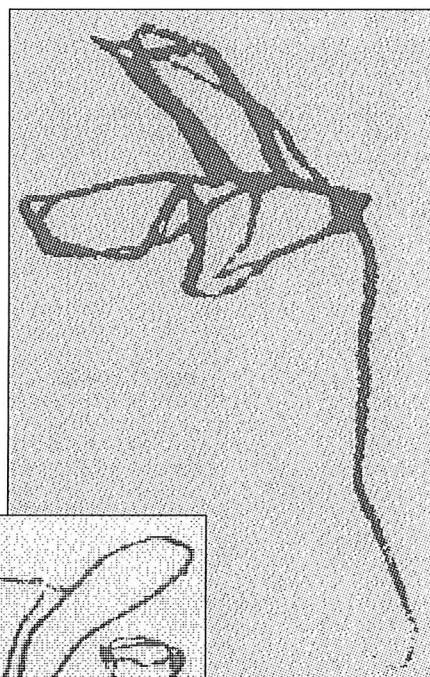
Somehow there seemed to be many Michael Caine films

that year, and more often that sunset was not visible behind the clouds and constant rain. The beauty was veiled and jaundiced that summer and the weather reflected my fortunes, the world became a darker place and often I would avoid going in that room and all the memories it had evoked.

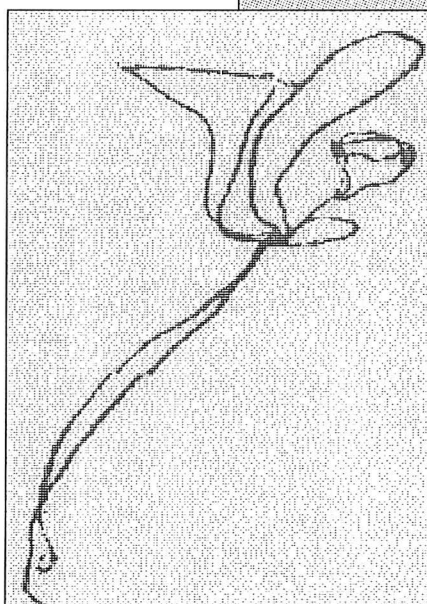
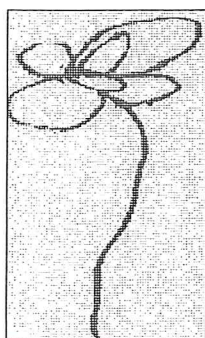
1999 has seen changes and stability now too. When I look out of that window now in an evening I recall the years past but also it stimulates hope for the future, it transports me to the source of so much joy and sadness in my life, amplifying my own emotions and in the fading light hastens the end of an era and all that has past, and the commencement of a new and uncharted future. *Anonymous*



Fish-e by Peter Myer



Flowers
by Sue Norris





How to reply to Pen Pals

- ☐ Please remember to let us know the full name (including surname) of the person who your letter is for.
- ☐ If you would like to write to 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 onto the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.

Daniel Barnett
Welwyn Garden City,
Hertfordshire

Hi,
I've just joined and thought I should introduce myself. My name is Daniel Barnett and I am 21.

I would very much like to have friends, male and female, but find this very difficult. I am studying for a BTEC in Performing Arts and Chicken Shed / Enfield College and I am finding it hard going. On my days off I help out at a garden centre near my home. I can ride my bicycle there but have to take a WAGN train and then a bus to get to Chicken Shed.

I come from a family of collectors so it's no wonder I collect early comic postcards, books illustrated with sketches (British and Foreign) and Elvis memorabilia. I enjoy 50s and 60s music.

I would love to speak to you all on the phone and write to you if you live a long distance away. I live in Welwyn Garden City.

Annika Lewry, Great Shelford

I am called Annika Lewry and suffer from Asperger syndrome. I do a lot of voluntary work doing conservation twice a week and helping special needs people twice a week. One group have Downs Syndrome and the other group are physically and mentally disabled. I used to volunteer in a nursery school. I have a habit of looking down at the ground — whenever I am in the town centre and avoiding car lights at night. I don't communicate with my conversation with people when on tasks and tend to work by myself. I also help special needs on Friday nights.

I live in my own home and do my own shopping and cleaning. I am quite a bright person with eight GCSEs, a basic Food Hygiene Certificate, an NVQ Level One in Catering, the three

Duke of Edinburgh Awards, two Marathon Certificates, though I can speak, its so I can help other people. I love reading, writing and playing tennis.

When I was at primary school my friends bullied me, at Secondary School I had no problems apart from being shy of the crowd. I have been to Brownies, Guides, done various evening courses, including computing, line dancing, step aerobics, and enjoy walking and cycling especially youth hostelling and doing them with my dad.

I have not got any friends but would like one who has similar interests. I am not interested in drama or music though I like listening to sixties music and I play the piano.

Jim Ashworth, Luton

I now live in Luton, although I was born in Lancashire and worked for a number of years in the Midlands. My interests include music (mainly classical), contemporary transport issues, walking and cycling. I am a practising Christian but certainly not a religious fanatic. I would be very happy to hear from anyone, of any age, particularly if they live in this area.

