

Produced by and for Autistic people

The *Spectrum*

Edition **113** January 2023



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The Spectrum

The Spectrum is run by and for autistic adults (although some parents subscribe on behalf of their under-sixteens). The magazine is owned and run by the National Autistic Society, and aims to connect autistic people through their letters and articles and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

Please note that *the Spectrum* receives many 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. The magazine protects the identity of contributors by not printing full names unless the writer asks for their full name to be used.

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This magazine was founded as *Asperger United* 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.

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. The name *the Spectrum* was suggested by dozens of people and chosen in an online poll in 2018.

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:

Web: **www.autism.org.uk/theSpectrum**

and follow the link to the submissions form.

Email: **the.spectrum@nas.org.uk**

The Goth
c/o The National Autistic Society
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG

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Please note that the views expressed in *the Spectrum* are not necessarily those of the editor, the National Autistic Society or those involved in the publication of the magazine.

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The Spectrum 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 *the Spectrum* by **13 February 2023**

Welcome to the January edition of *the Spectrum*.

I got some responses to last quarter's suggested theme of "art and creativity", but very few, so I've looked at what was sent in and decided that the theme this issue is "fitting in". So some of those pieces on art and creativity are in this edition — they fit the theme of fitting in just as well — along with several older pieces which I noticed followed the theme of fitting in.

That's how my editorial process works. All the unpublished pieces sit in a "pending" folder waiting for their chance to be chosen, either to fit the emerging theme, or to fill out the edition with some variety.

Fiction makes up about a third of this issue, again, and that is representative (actually, it's

under-representative) of the submissions that I've received. I know that fiction is one of the less popular categories that readers say they want, but as I say in every theme notice (the one on page 11 in this edition) the best way to change what gets printed in the magazine is to send something in.

I had a couple of pieces sent in about masking and performance (that is, having to pretend that you are a different personality to the person you really are) so I'm hoping that this quarter's suggestion is inspiring.

I shall be looking forward to the postbag, as ever.

Yours,

the Editor

the fitting-in edition — suggestion for next issue, page 11

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Dress to impress

by S Bee

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“I’m looking for something serious and sophisticated,” I began. “It’s my first date with Mark. He’s in senior management and he’s booked a table for us at Valentino’s.”

Shop owner Paula nodded. “Right. Well, these 1950s dresses have come in, Amy. They could be right up your street.”

Paula would know. I was a regular customer at her vintage clothes shop, A Touch of Class. I’d got to know Paula quite well. We were both currently single, and we both loved vintage outfits, so we had plenty to chat about.

I’d picked up some casual, pre-loved pieces here, but now I was in the market for smart with a capital S.

I made a beeline for the 1950s dress rail. Hmm, I mused . . . would IT high-flyer Mark be impressed with the bright orange, fully flared skirt part? I held doubts.

I had to bear in mind that Valentino’s was the swishest restaurant in town.

So I moved on to the 1970s numbers.

I skipped over the lime-green hot pants and wide-collared polka-dot-spotted blouses but, oh, this velvet, ankle-length, deep, deep scarlet, wide-sleeved dress might fit the bill — it was my size.

I tried it on — it was absolutely perfect!

“That one really flatters your figure, Amy,” Paula beamed.

I smiled. “Yes. I’ll take it!”

“Let me know how your date goes,” Paula said eagerly.

I happily paid and popped the dress in my Bag for Life. “I will!”

Of course, I didn’t get myself up like a 1970s babe completely.

Platform shoes might mean I’d tower over Mark, and I didn’t fancy spending hours trying to tame my hair into Farrah Fawcett waves.

On the date, it was clear Mark wasn’t a fan of vintage attire.

“Your dress reminds me of the one Morticia Addams wore,” he chuckled.

Matters didn’t improve when my wide sleeves accidentally dipped into the soup and after the meal, I tripped up over the hem. Everyone stared and tittered.

So I wasn’t surprised when later, Mark texted, “You’re fun and flamboyant — but not what I’m looking for. Sorry Amy.”

My heart sank.

When I next popped into A Touch of Class, I gave Paula an update.

“What a cheek! It looks nothing like Morticia Addams’ dress!” she stated haughtily.

“I agree. Anyway, my next date is with Ben, an artist, so I need something colourful and eye catching.”

The 1980s assorted rail gave me inspiration. I chose a baggy, bright yellow shirt. I'd wear my usual jeans with it.

I'd arranged to meet Ben in town — as he was a struggling artist, I assumed Valentino's would be off the agenda.

It was. We went for a drink — but as Ben kept banging on about being broke, I paid.

When we left, my spirit dropped when we headed to a cheap, nasty burger van.

I paid again, but when I ended up with ketchup on my shirt, I used it as an excuse to rush home.

"How did the date with Ben go?" Paula asked on my next visit.

I pulled a face. "Don't ask. I'm giving dating a swerve."

"Good. Take a seat. I'll make us a cuppa."

While Paula busied herself in the small back kitchen, I minded the counter. It gave me time to reflect on her words.

"What do you mean, 'Good'?" I asked when Paula returned.

"Why do you want a boyfriend, Amy?"

"I work in a call centre and my colleagues are women in my age group — twenties and thirties. All they talk about is what they did at weekends with their partners. They say: 'I remember when I was single, like you, Amy. It was awful, being stuck on my own.'"

"I see," Paula mused.

"I haven't told them about my dating disasters. But it'd be nice to join their couples chat," I added.

"Of course it would, but why do you think they're trying to make you feel inferior?"

I shrugged. "I don't know."

"I think it's about envy," she declared.

I spluttered over my tea. "Envy?"

"It's a well-known fact that people want what they can't have. You'd like a guy, simply to be 'in with the in-crowd.' They envy you, because I expect they'd like to be single sometimes."

"But they pity me!" I exclaimed.

"It's only a pretence, Amy. Honestly. Next time they say 'Oh it was awful, being single,' smile sweetly and say, 'It was for you, but it isn't for me. I don't have to change my life for a man. I can please myself, each and every day, and do you know what, girls? It's just brilliant!'"

I nodded. "I'll try it."

Paula's advice worked a treat. She was turning into a really good friend.

At work, I didn't get to join in with their couples chat, yet now I didn't care.

I focused on my work and weeks later, I was awarded "Employee of the month" and a bonus.

I knew exactly how to spend my bonus . . .

"I want to thank you for your advice," I began.

"There's no need —" Paula waved a hand.

"There's every need. Look, there's a big flea-market event in town next week, with a vintage clothes section. Fancy a browse? I'll throw in lunch as well — it's my treat."

"It's a deal!" she grinned.

Copying the “excessively kind character” to help get by: does reading fiction help autistic girls to mask?

by **Jemima Hill**

© Jemima Hill 2023

names have been changed

It is well known that girls are diagnosed with autism later than boys. Girls are also found to read more often and at a higher level than boys. I wondered whether there might be a link between these, and ran a research study to explore whether by reading storybooks more often than boys, girls better understand social behaviour, and so are more able to mask their autism and to “camouflage” with other children by demonstrating fewer autistic behaviours.

I talked to four girls who received an autism diagnosis between the ages of 16 and 20, and went to a mainstream school. All the participants loved reading — Sammy explained that when she was younger, if she wasn’t reading, then she was insisting on “imaginative play” of the books she had read: “It was very much I was reading or I was acting out what I had read!” All the girls agreed that they would “act out” things they read in storybooks, and this would help them to navigate social situations and to understand people better.

Zoe explained how reading helped her to predict how another person may react to a situation: “You’ve got kind of models for situations for instance, and well-fictionalised expected realities, and feel like okay, if people react, they might react like this because of this.”

Amy similarly described how copying a particular character could help with a particular difficulty. For example, “If I behave like the excessively kind character maybe I will stop being accidentally rude to people.”

Reading storybooks provides more than a character to imitate, however. Unlike television

or radio programmes which may also inform social understanding, fiction books have a narrator, someone who describes and explains the thoughts and feelings of the characters. The narrator provides a window into the mind of the character, helping the reader to understand why the character thinks and acts the way they do. For the autistic girls in this study, this helped them to understand other people, showing not only what people do in a certain situation, but also why they act in that particular way.

Amy described how stories helped her: “I can’t just look at people and know immediately what they are thinking, but when you are introduced to a character, because you are that character for a bit, then it does give you those other points of view.” She went on to explain that reading gives you an “extra bit of emotional information”, and that “it was the only time I could put together how people were responding to what people were saying.”

However, Zoe described how adopting another persona to mask her autism was stressful and tiring, especially when “everything builds up on you, and you can’t attempt to plaster that mask on”. The negative impact of masking to blend in with other people was also noted by Amy, who masked all the time at school, and so her struggles in the noisy school environment passed unnoticed by teachers. This shows how important it is to properly understand female autism and to improve diagnosis, as it appears that the different reading habits of girls affects their social behaviour and ability to mask, resulting in a later diagnosis, therefore lack of access to help and support.

So bright

by **Sammy**

© Sammy Maddison 2023

LABELLED

I'd rather have a bottle in front of me

Lager than Life

A

MILDFORM

2B

taken with a pinch of salt

BOTTLE CONDITIONED

Ailment

Measured

5.7

GENTLY POUR OUT

Fill to Brim

GOOD HEAD

Serve Chilled

World of the new

by **Oliver McCartney**

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Chapter 1: Start of a new day, start of a new story

Light shines in the room, blinding me as I attempt to open the curtain to start getting ready for work, having breakfast and then checking my computer for the files to send to Tenacity, aka my work place.

Tenacity is one of the tallest buildings in Skara city. I work in one of the office areas managing files that get out of place or sending information to other workers.

Before I go further, I think I should introduce myself. My name is Arron Cayne, but my friends call me Core. I'm 21 years old and my race is a Lyceen, a wolf-humanoid type race from a little-known planet called Vistea, a planet made up entirely of

forest. There is a lot of history behind our race but not as much as Humans, Arks, Androids and Fire Starters . . . and Fire Starters don't even speak!

Before I even get to the computer bit, my phone rings and seeing that it's Rayna Locke, I have to answer because if I don't I'm not going to hear the end of it.

Arron: Yes?

Locke: Arron, have you sent those files yet?

Arron: Can you wait? I just woke up.

Locke: Fine, just please send them.

Arron: Okay.

Locke: Oh, by the way, have you seen the tools from the storage unit? They went missing.

Arron: Really? Huh . . . Do you have any idea who did it?

Locke: No, not yet. Either way I have to get back to my work now, bye.

Arron: Later.

Rayna Locke was a Yuto which is a feline-humanoid race. She's been my co-worker ever since I came to Tenacity; she's a bit of a pain here and there because she always keeps bothering me to get back to my work. There are times when she and I get along or just have a small laugh but those are rare.

Anyways, I finish my breakfast and, looking outside the window, I see a blue sky and below it Skara city, the place I have called home for a good few years now.

Suddenly I get another call on my phone. Looking at my phone it's just a random number so I deny it but a few seconds later it returns and so, out of curiosity, I answer.

The first thing they do is end the call, leaving me confused and still needing to get ready for work.

I finally finish getting ready and grabbing my bag, I walk out the door just now to receive a notification on my phone, a text from Lezo to get to work already saying he was waiting a good few minutes for me now, and so with that I set off to work.

Chapter 2: The call with a familiar voice

Arriving at work, I'm greeted by Lezo.

Lezo is a good friend of mine and, same as Locke, I met him when I first got to Tenacity. He's an Android.

Lezo: You took a long time.

Arron: This is the usual time I show up,

a story (continued)

even Locke can tell you that.

Lezo: Yeah I would rather not ask her of all people . . . Hey, odd question but do you know anything about supernatural beings?

Arron: Not much: I know the Soul gates, the Void walkers, the Rifters . . . Wait, why do you ask?

Lezo: Oh, because I was reading this book on one and I thought, what if it was real?

Arron: Aren't they?

Lezo: Probably, but probably not.

Locke: Definitely not!

We turned to see Locke walking towards us.

Arron: Oh hey, Locke.

Locke: Arron.

Lezo: Excuse me Locke, why don't you believe in anything like that?

Locke: Well there's no real proof things like that exist

or ever did exist.

Arron: Besides myths and legends?

Locke: Yes.

Lezo: That's fair, but it is always fun to think about things like that though!

Locke: Look, if you two are done with this I need to get back to work.

Arron: Okay, later.

Lezo: Bye.

She walks off as Lezo and I stand there for a second.

Locke: You know you two should also get to your offices, you don't really get paid for chatter.

Arron: It feels like it at times.

I take my leave. Walking into my office I sit down at my desk and load up my laptop, at the same time I check my bag to find my iPad which has some files I need.

A lot of the workers in Tenacity get their own office whilst some others get like an office block, other rooms include

a break room, a closet full of brooms (and *only* brooms for some reason), a few science labs, with one currently belonging to a very angry cat plant someone made, and in the basement is the breaker room and all power systems linking to this building.

As I load up, I get another call by the same, mysterious number as at my apartment. This time I immediately grab my phone and accept the call.

Arron: Hello?!

Rory: Hey Core, it's Rory!

Arron: Sorry, who?

Rory: Rory Cantos? From high school?

Arron: Oh! Right, sorry . . . How have you been ever since then?

Rory: Uh I've been good. Got a job at a gas station, that's pretty cool.

Arron: Okay, well I'm at work so can we chat later?

Rory: Sure dude, I'll see you later.

Arron: Okay, bye.

I hang up and put down the phone, with the slight feeling of awkwardness now slowly fading.

Rory was an old friend from high school, he was a cool human, really nice guy and a much more laid-back person than I could ever wish to be, who never really raises his voice. Why call me now? I'm still a bit unsure but maybe he was just bored and wanted to call an old friend . . . maybe.

I continue to focus on my work. Every once-and-a-while wondering what I am going to do tonight when I get home, only to suddenly break out of my trance from a ding on my computer. The download is complete and ready to be sent to Locke, I wait for almost a minute until finally it says that it was successfully sent.

You know, maybe tonight I'll ask Rory if we can meet. Obviously he just seemed to be bored but I still want to know if the call was about something.

letters to the Editor

Hi

As an autism person, I've learnt that some things are out of our control . . .

Recently, I felt eager to contribute to a charity anthology, so I joined the Facebook group for the project.

I sent the group administrator a FB friend request and a polite, chatty private message. The friend request was accepted.

I also passed on the strict short story

presentation details to my writing circle and I issued FB invites to join the group.

I then emailed a story to the administrator, who selected the stories for the anthology.

But — gulp! — I realised that I'd forgotten to include elements concerning presentation of work.

I posted a few panic-riddled comments in the group, yet I was reassured — my story

would be considered.

So it was a horrible shock to discover that the next day, I'd been kicked out of the FB group.

The admin had also unfriended me.

I received a terse, cruel email message — my story had been deleted without being read. I wasn't given a proper explanation.

Although I felt deeply hurt by this discriminatory behaviour, there was

no point in pursuing it, as it was clear that the administrator had taken a dislike towards me expressing my anxiety in the FB group.

Like many others, I live with anxiety, depression and autism on a daily basis.

A tiny bit of understanding costs nothing.

Kind regards

S Bee

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Dear Goth,

Cyril the bird scarer is finally off the roof. He has been on it the three years we have been here at least. He was so effective that the gulls knocked him over. As a peregrine falcon lookalike, he leaves a lot to be desired. I was only able to reach him this year because someone was throwing out a ladder.

Last year all we had was a step ladder that would have been fatal to use, if I tried to stretch up to the flat kitchen roof and pull myself up (I would have looked like a Laurel-and-Hardy disaster).

Other methods to shift the noisy flocks included an ultrasonic bird scarer that is supposed to annoy the

creatures but doesn't; balloons with eyes on that frighten no one and silver twirly things that flashed light into the kitchen, to dazzle us and that the wife liked as decorations. All acting like that famous actor — Noah Vale.

The young birds, once out of the nest, walk about the street calling for food deliveries from their parents still — helpless and demanding like teenagers (Mum, where's my breakfast? Dad, can you lend me a fiver for lunch money?) Some of these grey perils never grow up, run down by cars or murdered by irate locals, who don't like them messing all over the place (don't they know there are public toilets?) They also don't like nests on their roofs. Still they are now an



endangered species (no wonder with this attitude towards them) but people round here don't care (country folk). Still that's life (and death).

Paigetheoracle

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The fish bowl on top of my head

by Jo Iveson

© Jo Iveson 2023
image © Jo Iveson 2023

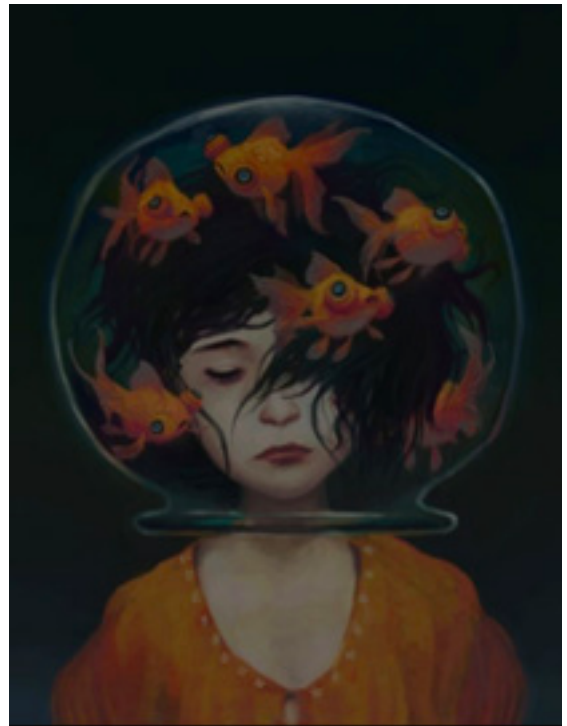
The fish bowl sits on top of my head.
My own personal, portable aquarium.
Too shallow to drown,
Too deep to swim.

Looking through a very dirty window,
I can make out the noises,
I can make out the shape of the words,
I cannot make out their meaning,
I cannot make out their reasoning.

The fish bowl sits on top of my head.
It fills up with water when I stand in a crowd,
It drains when I find my exit.
It bubbles to a fog when I speak my mind,
It calms when I bite my tongue and close my eyes.

The fish bowl on top of my head is my biggest burden,
And my greatest relief.
Frosted glass as my own social shield.

The fish bowl sits on top of my head and I wish it would never leave.



If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for April will be **masking, being conventional, and performing socially, or not**. 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, small pieces to fill awkward spaces like this, and art. **Please fill in a permissions form** when you submit something, as all published pieces require a completed permissions form. Remember, if you want to see different content in *the Spectrum*, the best way to change it is to send something in!

Ashburger's syndrome

by **Paigetheoracle**

© Paigetheoracle 2023

I'm clumsy. I've always been clumsy. People are terrified of telling me to take a break because I do. I break cups, glasses, plates — you name it. They nicknamed me Zorba the Greek, one place I worked because of this. Talking of jobs, with me they've always been few and far between. Nothing lasts long. I either get bored and leave or get sacked.

"Now look what you've done!" or "What happened to that order I gave you, to send out to Mr Harvey on the eighth?" (Well he didn't specify which month, did he?)

To say I was socially inept is mildly true too. If I had a drink in my hand, I'd either drop it or spill it on someone.

"You clumsy idiot!" (Well yes, I know that — can you be more specific or add something else of interest to that point?)

I was never a great talker and got on better with kids and animals than I ever did with adults or the human race altogether.

"Stop grimacing at me you nutter!" And other plaudits like this, would come my way. Talk? How could I? I could barely get my body to work, let

alone my brain. Occasionally I'd let slip a terrible pun, to break the ice, in social situations. Every time I tried to be clever, an uncoordinated load of stumbling rubbish would come out.

"What do you mean, I-I-I, ig ag ooh?"

Ruthless mickey-takers, at work or down the pub, would plough right into me as soon as I opened my mouth, so I shut up again or I'd burst into hysterical laughter as I found the joke funnier than anyone else.

"For Christ's sake shut up! The joke's over!"

Then there were the times I couldn't understand what anybody else said. It was like that Far Side cartoon — what you say and what a dog hears:

"Blah, blah Rover. Rover blah, blah."

It was like I was hearing a foreign language or none at all.

"Cat got your tongue? Well it bloody should have — you don't use it enough to need it!" (Ha-ha, very funny, I thought but couldn't stand the humiliation of trying to actually say it.)

Humiliation? Now that's something I know well! Yes, my literal sense of humour categorised me as autistic, even if nothing else did. Then there was phonetic spelling.

"That's not how you spell it Wright — get a dictionary!" (Wright, wrong again! School, who needs it? If they want to spell it that way, why can't they say it that way too? It's all so jumbled up and illogical!)

There's some legend that says having Asperger's makes you a mathematical genius — not me. On the way to school I obsessively count the telephone poles, yes, but I couldn't add up to save my life or yours, when in the classroom. Oh yes, the stories of us being selfish and self-centred are true. We live in our own little world and you can't enter, even with a valid passport. Our borders are closed and nobody can come through without our express permission, so turn your tanks round and go home.

We are a strange mix of contradictions: egotistical, blunt in our speech, when we do open our mouths. Bloody-minded and stubborn, yet fearing confrontation because in a fight, we wouldn't know when to stop — at least that is what we

believe. It takes a hell of a lot to get us going and just as much to put the brakes on. Quick to anger, slow to cool down and come back into Earth orbit, if we don't miss it altogether. Innocent, vulnerable, trusting and blundering. It is this openness and honesty that turns us into the brainy creature we so often are. While others play about in the classroom or outside it in the playground, developing their social skills through interaction, we shut up, sit still, and look and learn. We shut them out and let the light of understanding in. Ordinary people connect with the outside world, through talk and physical contact — not us. We are geeky, clumsy and inappropriate in our comments and movements but we connect internally with ideas. They can dance, play football, cake on make up or make cup cakes but not us. Books are our only friends — failing that, our computer screens are. We'd rather text than talk, write and read rather than speak — even to each other. We want to know how the universe works and maybe even, one day, we'll find out how we work. But not today, oh no, not today . . .

We know we are not liked — even feared and despised by some people, or why attack us? (You only bully what you're afraid of — what challenges you to be what you are not or at least makes you think about it as a subject.) Limited intelligence, criminality and defensiveness go together — leading to ignorance and suppression by

those wanting to shut out the light. Perpetual motion and emotion, keeps them on the move but not us. We don't want to leave home or even go out. We just want to collect our train numbers or plonk about on our computers in peace. Failing that we want to vegetate in front of the goggle box. We are not active participants in life. We are just passive viewers, along for the ride. (Don't ask us to drive — we're not up to it or up for it either.) We understand sound and motion go together (as with music and dance) but we are detached because we are observers of life, not activists. (We don't move with the times because we are lumps of rock — orderly and controlled, not relaxed.) We see only chaos and confusion in the world — danger we are not ready to face. Go for a swim? No thanks! You could drown and then there's all the pollution in the sea and God knows what in the rivers and swimming pools! We don't enjoy our lives, we study them for that great examination in the sky, when we all kick the bucket. (Did we do well?) Live our lives? Maybe next time. Spontaneity is for wimps — we love routine. Order and discipline, that's us.

We're not in our bodies but always outside, looking in. This explains our odd gait as we're not in contact with life or society's natural rhythms.

We feel continually under stress because we are. Our twitching, tics and odd mannerisms show this. I need

to crack my joints continually because of this (neck, between the shoulders, lower back [especially this point], ankles, knee caps, wrists, fingers and toes — by the way did I mention we're obsessive list makers?) This is why you'll see me, and others like me, suddenly tilt their heads to one side or move our hands and feet into strange positions, for no apparent reason — we need to relieve our spasticity. (Perhaps this is where “jerk” comes from as an insult?) It could explain the difficulty with swallowing, indigestion, sensory sensitivity and allergies as well. Maybe too, it explains the dietary fads of eating nothing but a particular food — like crisps, beans, bread or biscuits — for months, even years on end (I've heard that we're carb eaters, avoiding protein and choking on fats).

Is it any wonder that we're stressed? Our attention-to-detail-driven characters, fear of making mistakes, rigid personalities (love of tight clothing), passion for order, discipline and routine — all contribute to the pressure we feel under and put ourselves under. If we weren't so visually orientated, we probably wouldn't be so language impaired, continually swallowing nervously in social situations. This passivity and receptivity is probably what allows us to be so logical but it also leads to the need for space and the temper tantrums that follow, should we not get it and find we cannot cope: the sensory influx that drives us insane —

an article (continued) and another article

the obsessive compulsion to wash our hands and protect ourselves from every other potential danger turns us into an explosive powder keg of emotions, which blows up like a volcano every so often.

They say it is a male thing, this turning down and in, in curiosity, then up and out with answers and insights. This mental pressure is the same as physical pressure as in sex and other expressions, I believe. The physics of it is male concentration versus female dispersal of attention and energy. This is why

males are more volatile and suspicious because of it (wound up and easily triggered into action, rather than relaxed and patient). I often wondered if my lower-back flexing was down to some kind of static build up, needing to be discharged through movement of some kind. Maybe it builds up through hip and spine motion? Kundalini eat your heart out! Maybe death is the biggest orgasm there is and that is what we're dying to find out?

Am I obsessed with me?
Yes but I am you. This is why I have such an identity crisis too.

I know the world in general but not me in particular. I'm a chameleon that blends into the background — a Zelig-like character that is invisible to all, disappearing before anyone noticed he was there: Death, where is thy sting? Toaster, where is thy ping? Tucking into my three slices of burnt bread (never four, never two) I slide into my life of dull obscurity and wish you goodbye as you drift on down the river of life and I stay stuck on my island of sanctity, worshipping existence in my own monkish way, trying not to make a habit of it and failing . . .

A day in my shoes

by **M.G.A**

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Anger pumps through my veins like a badly taken drug. As my eyes scan over the paper, they become glossy and devoid of all emotion. The once seemingly important words now seem cold and meaningless. They now only fuel my anger and sadness more as my thoughts echo through my mind torturously.

It's not fair! I haven't done anything wrong so why am I being punished? Why do they get to have something I don't yet I'm sure I want it more? Why do I have to pay the price for their mistakes? Why did this have to happen to me? Why?

It's not fair at all. I wish I could have at least a day where I am not so maliciously punished. But the truth is I know that's not possible; I'm sure I could last a day in someone else's shoes, but they wouldn't be able to last a day in my shoes.

They wouldn't like constantly being told they need to be more empathic. That they need to put themselves in someone else's shoes. When nobody even tries to put themselves in theirs in return, and they can't even blame them, because even if they tried, nobody understands or knows what it's like to be in those shoes. They couldn't cope with

the constant noises like the ticking of a clock. Or the sound of felt tips being all you can hear. Feeling like someone's viciously scratching at their brain, therefore not being able to focus on anything else.

They couldn't cope with not being able to cope with lots of people around. They couldn't cope with the sickly, dizzy, faint feeling or the constant feeling of everyone's eyes on them. I know they couldn't. They couldn't cope with having to try and carefully construct their sentences so whoever they are talking to doesn't misunderstand and think they are rude or become

an article (continued) and a poem

offended. How everytime they speak they constantly overthink, not wanting to offend anyone.

They couldn't cope with only being able to cope with five foods — literally five foods — any other food making them nauseous and physically sick. Any other food making them extremely ill and anxious.

They couldn't cope with physically gagging so much they're unable to breathe due to certain smells.

They couldn't cope with unnecessarily missing years of education due to other people's mistakes, they couldn't cope with the constant panic attacks and unnecessary stress just at the thought of school because they just don't understand. They couldn't cope with constantly being let down by the education system over and over.

They couldn't cope with the constant anxiety, the constant fear, constant what-ifs? They couldn't cope with the many unreasonable, terrifying worries, forcing themselves to stay awake in fear. They couldn't cope with the guilt. With staying up late after an argument feeling guilty and like they have given in to the argument. They couldn't cope with never meaning to start an argument but doing so anyway because of how totally stuck on things they get, not being able to move on and feeling insanely bad due to loving their family unconditionally.

They couldn't cope with feeling like they are just a nightmare to live with or spend time with. They couldn't cope with not wanting to get mad and say mean things but they just spill out. They couldn't cope with worrying people will get sick of them and have enough of them. They couldn't cope with hating themselves for making people they care about feel sad and stressed.

That's not even the worst of it though, the sensory side is so, so, so, so much worse because absolutely nobody understands it and they couldn't cope with it. They couldn't cope with people not really getting that they want to be able to wear the trendy and stylish clothes, that they want to be able to have lots of comfortable outfits to go out in comfortably. They couldn't cope with people not understanding that it's not that they're not trying new clothes, that they're not even looking and just can't be bothered. It's that they can't cope with how it feels on them, that they try them on and just want to cry when it feels so horrible — it feels indescribable — not that they would understand anyway.

They couldn't cope with constantly looking at clothes, hoping to find something they like and rarely they do. Every time they find something they would love to wear, but they know they can't, that they wouldn't be able to cope with

it and it makes them want to cry because it's not fair. They couldn't cope with the fact that fashion excludes a lot of people, intentionally or not, it does. School uniform is a perfect example of this: it singles out the children like them who can't cope with the neurotypical uniform, and forces them to suffer unless they want to be different, want to stand out. They can't win, choose to comply and suffer in silence but when they choose to stand out it's discouraged, like it's breaking a rule that shouldn't necessarily be there in the first place.

As I'm snapped out of my thoughts by the constant ticking of the clock, I can't help but focus on anything but the sound scratching my brain; I feel a tear slip down my cheek as I realise just how unfair it really is.

Lemon tree

by Jenna

© Jenna Woodford 2023

We planted a
Lemon seed.

An escapee from a
Lemon squeezed,
Carelessly, while watching
Guardians of the Galaxy
On DVD.

Lemon tree
We call you Groot

Bond, James Bond

fan fiction by **David Cohen**

James Bond, Moneypenny and the Bond universe are all individually

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MI6, London, UK:

“James, how wonderful to see you. I’ve really missed you.”

“You’re new aren’t you?”

“Yes, I’m the new secretary.”

“Busy tonight? Fancy having a deep conversation about the new National Railways timetable?”

“Flattery will get you nowhere, but don’t stop trying.

“Anyway, M is ready and will see you now.”

“See you afterwards, then.”

“Ahh, 007.25394176 recurring. I assume you’ve been introduced to my new secretary.”

“Yes, but what happened to Moneypenny?”

“She retired. I assume you approve of her replacement, Ms Moneypound.”

“Well, I suppose that’s inflation for you, sir.”

“Just leave the wise cracks to me, 007.25394176 recurring.”

“Err, I prefer 007.25, sir.”

“Very well. Now listen up 007.25, His Majesty’s Government has a problem. Euro

Scotland. You’ll be aware, that with the Queen passing away, they’ve now broken away from the UK to re-join the EU, and we believe it could become a bit of a rogue state if circumstances take a wrong turn.

We have very strong intelligence that a Neurotypical monarch is about to become head of state there. We must stop this happening at all costs, and appoint an Autistic head of state, who will have a strong sense of social justice, be truthful, supportive, decent, honest, loyal, incorruptible and above all, not be embarrassed about talking openly about sex. It’s all in the file 007.25, so make sure you study it closely.”

“But sir, can’t I just do some admin work, some filing, that sort of thing, I’m sure I’d be really good at it — very repetitive, need for consistency and accuracy, following instructions, attention to detail, improving the system.”

“Now listen 007.25, you’re paid a lot of money to do what you do.”

“Yes sir, and the pressure is getting to me — to be honest, I’d rather be tapping the keys on the computers that Q is using, and working on those amazing gadgets. I’m sure there’s tons of paperwork.”

“Never mind all that, which you can do when you retire. And talking of Q, make sure you go and see him straight away, as he’s got some new fangled thing, that’ll be vital help on this assignment.”

“Very well, sir.”

a story (continued) and two poems

“Oh, and 007.25, make sure you keep a lid on the stimming this time. On your last assignment, with your constant pacing up and down, you wore out the carpets in the White House. The President and First Lady were not amused I can tell you, and it nearly caused a rather embarrassing diplomatic incident at the highest levels.”

“Er, yes, I’ll do my best, sir. I’ll make sure I take my comfort blanket this time, and maybe repeat a few names here and there if things get bad.”

“Good luck 007.25.”

Down in the MI6 basement technology labs:

“Hello Q. Hmm, she’s nice — maybe I can grab a coffee with her later and talk about the ins and outs of early motion-picture history, concentrating on the late 19th Century, with particular focus on nitrate film.”

“Pay attention 007.25, I haven’t got all day.”

“What have you got for me this time, Q?”

“Now, this device, contained in a fountain pen, is actually a Neurotypical Identification Tracker, or N.I.T. for short. When N.I.T. is pointed at someone, it’ll flash green indicating a positive match, this highlighting an Autistic

person of the right integrity for this very important and responsible role. If it flashes red, then you know the person is Neurotypical, and to be avoided at all costs. Now, this pen cost the Earth to manufacture, so make sure you bring it back. Oh, and 007.25, don’t use it as an actual pen, as it may have unintended consequences. We had to cut the testing short due to budget cutbacks.”

“Seems simple enough to me, Q.”

“Yes, 007.25, you always say that.”

Seven days later . . . everyone in Euro Scotland is glued to a screen somewhere, someplace . . . The Queen is dead!

All hail the King!

James VIII of Scotland!

Long live the King!

“That blasted pen went haywire when I tried to get it to work, and identified myself as the best person for the role as head of state. Still, I suppose it’ll be a damn sight easier and more suitable for me than being a secret agent, plus they’ll have the first straight talking monarch in over 850 years. Now, where’s my comfort blanket...?”

Self-reflection

When I look at myself in the mirror,
I can’t help but feel like something is lost.
However what has been lost can be found,
I do wonder how much it will cost.
What could I do, I just wish the pain to ease
The answer is never easy nor is embossed.
When the sun rises, light warms the way,
The mirror begins to clear, begins to defrost
Who would help me, who can help me,
The mirror reveals myself.

Appearances

Appearances can deceive
They shape the way people perceive
For example, look at this suit
Underneath it all I could be a raging brute
Or a quiet reserved mute
We should not judge by how one presents
Perhaps we should focus on one’s contents

poems by **Joshua Oliver**

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Neurodivergence and animals

by **Kayleigh**

© Kayleigh Butler 2023

Have you ever noticed how most Autistic people find it incredibly easy to make friends with animals and yet struggle with the nuances of human relationships? It's almost like animals understand us just as well as we understand them.

Sensory benefits of owning a pet are incomparable to anything else. Whether it's the warm fluffy cuddles of a cat or dog, or the bumpy back of a reptile, there are many ways to have a connection. It's calming and releases oxytocin which is great for stress relief. Something very common with Autistic people is to feel discomfort or even pain with physical contact from other people but pets seem to have a different effect. Having a pet wandering around at your heels and curling up in your lap brings all sorts of positive feelings. Pets can prevent a meltdown and support you through a meltdown as well, when I'm getting stressed and upset nothing calms me more than a snuggle on the sofa with my kitten (Loki). The sound and vibration of her purrs, the soft, silky fur, her gentle weight on my lap, it is very relaxing.

She really helped my depression when I'm home alone. It used to be a very quiet, lonely place when my partner was out at work, but now I have a reason to get out of bed. Seeing her running around and coming to me for cuddles makes me feel a fraction better than I used to.

I like owning pets, they don't seem to judge in the same way people do. They don't make you feel bad, and they apologise or at the very least show their guilt when they misbehave. It's a basic level of communication that doesn't feel utterly exhausting by the end of the day.

Given the benefits I cannot comprehend why service animals (other than guide dogs)

are not recognised in the UK and why we do not have easy access to trainers that can greatly improve our lives by having our pets respond to our conditions and emotions in a useful way, but maybe one day we will. That does not mean we can't train our pets ourselves and find the best one to support us in our everyday lives. I'd recommend googling the kind of traits you'd like in a pet to help find the perfect breed or animal for you. (Please make sure you buy pets responsibly and that you are able to care for, or have someone able and willing to care for, your pet as they are a long-term commitment.)

I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and New Year.

Kayleigh

(aka Kayleigh's Creative World)



stuff you might like to know about *the Spectrum*

The rules of *the Spectrum*

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

- 1) *The Spectrum* is funded by the National Autistic Society and readers' subscriptions. We welcome submissions on any topic from people across the whole of the autism spectrum.
- 2) *The Spectrum* is quarterly, published in January, April, July and October. If you do not receive a copy when you expect to, please contact the magazine.
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My diagnosis present

by **Rebecca Caine**

All is well around me, when all is well within
Have no fear
Give up your resentments
Let go of your pain

Be still
Be here
Trust
All you have is now. It is enough

All is good around me, when I love within
Take the walls down
Don't regret the past
Let go and forgive

Be grateful
Be kind
Accept
All you have is you. It is enough

All is well around me, when I am understood
Can you see me?
Do I fit in?
Do you hear me?
My people do. We are more than enough

The Spectrum, c/o National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Telephone: **0808 800 1050** (free from most landlines) or
Telephone: **020 7923 5779** (geographical charges apply)
Email: the.spectrum@nas.org.uk
Website: www.autism.org.uk/thespectrum



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