National Autistic Society

The Spectrum

Edition **124** October 2025

produced by and for autistic people

About *the Spectrum*

The Spectrum is produced by and for autistic adults. We welcome submissions on any topic from autistic people who are over 18.

The Spectrum is published quarterly, in January, April, July and October, in print and online.

To submit an item to *the Spectrum,* please go to **autism.org.uk/theSpectrum** and follow the link to submit your work.

Although most issues are themed, submissions on any subject are welcome. Only some of the magazine's content will follow the theme. All submissions may be edited, especially for privacy, libel and for fitting the space available.

Please note that *the Spectrum* receives many submissions 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.

Pieces that appear in *the Spectrum* are credited using the author's first name only, unless the author requests an alias. This is done to protect their privacy.

The National Autistic Society promotes *the Spectrum* on social media using pieces selected from the magazine.

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

The Spectrum online version is available at **autism.org.uk/theSpectrum**

You can email *the Spectrum* at **spmag@nas.org.uk**

History

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 lack of services for autistic people and the potential for self-help and networking as a means of support.

The purpose of the magazine was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at.

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

The former Editors and Sub-editors are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds, John Joyce, the Goth and Charlotte.

In 2024, Fiona and Charlotte, autistic members of the National Autistic Society's Content team, became joint editors. In October 2025, Helen, another autistic member of staff, took over from Charlotte as Co-editor.

Welcome to the October issue

Hello,

I wanted to introduce myself as the new Co-Editor of *the Spectrum*. I'm Helen, and I was diagnosed in 2023, 19 years after my brother, who was diagnosed in his teens. I'm among the many late-diagnosed adults, but no matter what age you join the autistic community, having autistic spaces like *the Spectrum* feels so vital. Seeing your stories, honest thoughts and creative endeavours on these pages brings me so much joy.

It feels somewhat cliché to say it, but it is genuinely a great privilege to work on this magazine, and we feel very strongly about preserving an autistic-owned space when so few exist in the world. In these tumultuous times, please hold on to the joy you have and hold on tight, and if you're struggling to find joy right now, please know you're not alone.

With this in mind, we would like to suggest a theme for the next issue, which you can find on page 4. We hope you enjoy this issue.

Yours,

Fiona and Helen

the Editors

Contents

Poem

Prediagnostic call

By Rebecca

I'm sat here waiting for you to call
Will this be the end or the beginning of all
with whirring questions going round in my brain
playing what's called the waiting game

The call springs to life the gate keeper is there
She looks at me and watches as I sit and stare
Where will this lead the path that never ends
moving round many twisting turns and bends

From pregnancy, birth, childhood and all
laying my scars bare during this frightening call
answering questions after questions after more
starting to wonder what this all is for

My eyes hurt, my brain whirs with the drilling talk
will this get me the answers or just make me baulk
as heavy tears roll down my cheek
I've been misunderstood again and now to wait a week

Going over and over the responses I gave
Did I do enough to see inside the cave?
Was I autistic enough for you to see
the difficulties I have with being me?

Seeing is believing or so they say
wondering if the toll of today will pay
trusting my future in the hands of strangers
scared to see the pain and dangers

I know what I am and that it is there
but will they shatter my illusion with one quick tear
The paper in front of my face
oh no this isn't your race

I will fight for what's right
I will walk the rope tight
facing obstacles and hurdles
hoping I won't feel like I was burgled

Whatever the case will be will be
Was I autistic enough for you to see
the difficulties I have with being me?

Next issue's theme:

The suggested theme for the January 2026 edition is: Preserving joy.

You are invited to interpret this any way you like and respond to it in writing or with visual art. You may want to share something about dedicated interests that bring you joy, the ways you preserve your joy in daily life, people who bring you joy or how hard it can be to preserve even a little joy.

We also welcome submissions on any other topic of your choosing, unrelated to the suggested theme. Remember to complete a permissions form for your submission, as we can't publish anything without it. Please submit work at autism.org.uk/the-spectrum

Artwork

Flourish

By Sally

Article

Performative acceptance

By Hannah

As recent news on the topic of autism has seemed much less than positive, I've recently been pondering the topic of autism acceptance. Debate in the autistic community around the terminology and focus for events such as Autism Awareness Day each April often centres around what we should be fighting for. Awareness seems moot - everyone by now is aware of autism and that autistic people exist, albeit they may have very limited and misinformed views of what that actually means. Therefore, many people want to see the focus put more onto autism acceptance, which seems to make sense. You know we're here, but we now want you to accept us, as we are, and presumably a further step or two, in terms of embracing us and genuinely allowing us to feel like we belong. Which doesn't sound like that much to ask really, but we are clearly a long way from that, as the recent slew of horrendous news reports showed us.

So, I got stuck on the concept of acceptance and how I have personally seen this play out. What I've seen, by all but a tiny number of people, in my own experience, is that any acceptance is really only surface-level at best and often feels performative.

No one wants to actively look like a bigot or to be discriminatory or prejudiced. Well, perhaps some do or at least don't care about it - some in worryingly high positions of power, but that's another topic entirely.

We hear of green-washing [a PR tactic used to make a company or product appear environmentally friendly, without meaningfully reducing its environmental impact] and there's even the purple-washing when it comes to disability, but this is often used to describe larger organisations rather than individuals. Trying to outwardly be seen to be accepting and embracing, while actually doing very little to authentically support the cause or group they claim to be so caring about.

When it comes to acceptance of autism on an individual basis, it seems that many people are happy to accept our autistic selves as long as we don't seem 'too autistic'. Basically, while our autism impacts very little on them and causes them no discomfort, they're totally accepting. Especially when there are others around to witness their 'acceptance'.

But once anything happens that is too 'uncomfortable', that acceptance rapidly dries up.

I'm fortunate in a lot of ways that I can mask a lot of the time, but for this reason, I've witnessed a lot of this performative acceptance. Because as soon as the mask slips, and it eventually always does, so does the acceptance of a lot of people.

People are generally accepting of a need for details and clarity, until they feel that your questions are undermining them or questioning their authority.

People are generally accepting of a bit of anxiety, until you have a panic attack in public and then everyone nervously steps aside or looks the other way.

People are generally accepting of the fact you need some things doing slightly differently, until you dare to ask for adjustments and suddenly you are 'unreasonable'.

People are generally accepting of sensory differences, until you ask for them to refrain from wearing the perfume that makes you feel physically sick and it's too much of an imposition.

People are generally accepting of the fact that you get overwhelmed, until you have a public meltdown and they can never look at you the same way again and slowly remove themselves from your life.

In my experience, very few people are accepting of an autistic person in distress. Meltdowns have been known to lead to the autistic person being sectioned, because society does not accept these things, even though they are a very real part of our reality. These aren't one-off events, and they affect the multiple marginalised autistic population significantly more – highlighting even further and more prejudiced conditions placed on any sort of acceptance of us.

Most people, it seems, are willing to accept autistic people as long as they don't really come across as particularly autistic. As long as we don't make them feel uncomfortable with our differences. As long as we don't make a fuss or need adjustments or embarrass or inconvenience them in any way.

This doesn't feel like true acceptance to me, and I am not willing to accept anyone's performative display or virtue-signalling. So, let's not wait until the next 'acceptance day' to push for true acceptance, and let's not settle for any more performative or conditional acceptance of who we are. We deserve more, and there's a long, long way to go until we get there.

Poem

Survival

By Louisa

Today I went for a swim

I divided the water with my empathy and control

Though the current of judgement
eventually became too strong.

So, I began to float on the pleasing of others

The waves of change came harder.

Faster.

Forcing me to submission.

So, I began to drown

Never sinking

Propped by the expectations of society

Tomorrow, I will swim again.

Article

The in-between: grieving, growing, becoming

By April

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Growing up, I always felt out of place, not quite knowing why. I felt misunderstood and unseen, like I was speaking a language no one around me could understand, and was constantly trying to fit in, while never quite feeling like I belonged.

In my early adulthood, I learned about autism when my son was diagnosed. After doing some research, I quickly realised that so many of the traits and experiences associated with autism deeply resonated with me. It became clear that I was autistic too, and that this explained the silent struggles I had never been able to put into words.

For years, I had sensed something was different about me, something unspoken and invisible, but real. However, at that point, I didn't feel the need to get an official diagnosis, as I had already gone through life without a diagnosis and had 'managed' fine. Since I had already finished school, I didn't think a diagnosis would be beneficial to me anymore.

After many years of knowing I was autistic but without an official diagnosis, I finally decided to contact my GP to start the diagnosis process. After two years on the waiting list, I was diagnosed about a year ago, at the age of 29.

When I was finally diagnosed, I thought I'd feel relieved, like my struggles were finally justified and my differences made sense. I imagined that having an answer would bring comfort.

And it did. I felt relieved, justified, comforted.

But that didn't last long.

Almost immediately, it was replaced by something else, something heavy. Grief. Loneliness. Confusion. I started to see my entire life through a new lens, one that made everything both clearer and harder to accept. I thought, 'How did I not see this before?' And then, 'Why didn't anyone else?'

It felt like I was starting to mourn a version of myself. The one who spent years trying to fit in, trying to make sense of things that didn't make sense and blaming myself when they didn't. The diagnosis didn't magically erase the pain of those years. In some ways, it made that pain louder.

I struggled with my identity. I found myself constantly wondering who I was underneath all the years of masking. There were moments when I hated being autistic, not because I saw autism as bad, but because I couldn't separate my suffering from it. Every meltdown, every sensory overload, every time I felt 'too much' or 'not enough', every time people around me would not understand me, I started to pin it to autism. And it hurt. Because those weren't just struggles I had, they were part of how I exist in the world. I didn't want to feel that way, but I did. And that made me feel ashamed. How could I hate something that wasn't just a part of me – but was me?

I began to notice my traits more intensely. Things I once brushed off now felt amplified. I wondered how many times I had masked without even realising it. I questioned who the 'real me' even was underneath all that effort to blend in. And worst of all, I felt like no one around me could truly understand what I was going through. Maybe no one ever would.

The hardest part was that I had already spent years learning about autism. I thought I was prepared. I thought knowledge would protect me from pain. But nothing could've prepared me for what it felt like to finally turn that lens inward. To see my personality – the things I thought were just 'me' – and realise they were actually autistic characteristics. It was like my whole identity shifted. Every struggle, every quiet overwhelm, every little quirk had a name now. And instead of comfort, I felt exposed. I thought I had accepted it, but it turned out I had only accepted the idea of autism, not the reality of living it.

I kept smiling. I kept showing up. But inside, I felt like I was slowly fading. I didn't know how to talk about it. I didn't want to be pitied, doubted or judged. I just wanted someone to sit with me in the in-between, between the knowing and the accepting, between the grief and the growth. To support me and not try to 'fix me'.

Over time, I began to find moments of clarity. I started to give myself permission to feel it all: the sadness, the anger, the relief, the hope. I realised that diagnosis isn't a finish line. It wasn't even the beginning. It's a doorway – an in-between. And it takes time to walk through it. It may take days, or it may take years, but eventually you will get to the other side.

I'm still figuring things out. Still unlearning, still uncovering, still healing. After all, I've only known the masked version of April, shaped by expectation. I've spent 30 years surviving as someone I thought I had to be. Learning to live as who I truly am is taking time, and that's okay. But I'm slowly learning that my traits are not flaws to fix, they are reflections of the way my mind is uniquely wired, my way of being, my own experience of the world. They aren't broken pieces in need of repair, but meaningful parts of who I've always been, even when the world didn't understand them. And now I'm starting to see myself clearly, I can finally start to unapologetically appreciate the beauty in who I am, exactly as I am.

Yes, I have struggles. But I've learned to start seeing my unique qualities and appreciating them. Being autistic means I am empathetic, I am deeply observant, I feel things intensely and I care with my whole heart. I notice what others overlook. I think in rich, layered ways, and I experience the world with a depth that is uniquely mine. I am perfect just the way I am. Perfect with all my imperfections. Even though this process is incredibly difficult, I know now that it is better to know. My diagnosis gave me something real to hold on to. It validated my experiences in a way nothing else ever had. It gave me permission to seek adjustments, to honour my needs, to stop apologising for struggling. Even then, I still felt like an impostor asking for help. I had to unlearn the idea that I needed to 'cope' quietly and instead relearn how to advocate for myself with compassion or ask someone else to advocate for me.

My diagnosis gave me the courage to finally seek the help I had convinced myself I didn't deserve or need. For the first time, I allowed myself to ask for support, to explore accommodations, and to speak honestly about my needs. What surprised me was the validation that followed, the reassurance that I wasn't actually alone. There were people out there who understood, who spoke the same unspoken language. I just had to find my people: autistic people like me and neurotypical people who could understand and support me. And when I did, something in me began to heal.

The journey to self-acceptance hasn't been linear, but it's been liberating.

To anyone reading this who feels lost, overwhelmed or unsure after a diagnosis – I see you. Your emotions are valid. You are not broken. You are not alone.

I believe that each of us deserves the chance to feel understood, celebrated and safe to be exactly who we are. That's why I'm choosing to turn my journey into something meaningful to embrace, encourage, empower, educate. Whether you're newly diagnosed or deep into your self-discovery, I want you to know: you are worthy, you are enough and your light matters.

Let's walk this journey together. One honest step at a time.

Article

Coming clean at work

By AtypAlly

In a small room with stale biscuits and a humming strip light, I told my team I am AuDHD, explaining what it is, what helps, and what does not. The long pause that followed saw everyone suddenly studying their notepads, as if it were the most fascinating document they had ever seen.

From that moment on, reactions split sharply. Some people simply did not believe me, claiming I “did not look autistic” or that “everyone gets distracted”, with one person even suggesting I keep such things to myself if I wanted to be taken seriously. A few others decided I was angling for special treatment and resented me for it, which you could feel in their sighs, their cooler tone and the extra scrutiny on every small request I made; my paperwork and official diagnosis did not matter. I tried to outrun their assumptions with longer hours, yet you simply cannot outwork a story someone prefers to believe.

Others believed me but quietly moved me out of the way, suggesting I “maybe shadow this one” or skipping me on a fast client call, while invitations to away days simply disappeared. In meetings, a chair’s width opened up on either side of me; no one was unkind, they were just careful, but care at arm’s length is still a form of distance.

Both routes led to the same destination: less trust, fewer chances and smaller work. One camp thought I was lying for attention or preferential treatment, while the other worried I might crack under pressure. I am neither; I am fine when the basics are in place, like clear goals, decisions in writing and time to focus without the office radio leaking through thin walls - none of which are exotic requests, but rather just the proper way to run a team.

The strangest shift was how the same behaviour was relabelled; before I said anything, direct questions meant I was being thorough, but afterwards, they were considered rigid. While a quick walk to reset used to be proactive, now it looked like a warning sign. Nothing changed except the lens through which I was viewed.

There were, however, some bright spots. A manager asked what a good day and a rough day looked like, and we agreed on small things: an agenda before the meeting, action items afterwards, a corner seat away from a flickering light and real blocks for deep work. By measuring the work rather than the performance of work, the team moved faster without needing a town hall meeting about it.

My side of the bargain is simple: I will keep requests specific and lead with my strengths, which include pattern spotting, making messy projects legible and asking questions that save 20 minutes later. Judge me on three things: the quality of my analysis, the value I deliver and the deadlines I meet. If those things slip, then fair enough, but if they do not, leave the commentary on my style at the door.

If you are sceptical about disclosures, ask what proof would change your mind, and if the answer is nothing, say that out loud so we can stop pretending. If you do believe me but then start removing my work ‘for my own good’, ask what I actually need first - it is usually smaller than you think and is often just a seat away from the buzzy fridge and notes that everyone can see.

We need better education on neurodivergence because most bias is simply quiet processes and cautious habits. Reasonable adjustments help everyone, not just neurodivergent people; quiet rooms help anyone with migraines, flexible hours help a person caring for a sick relative and remote options help parents when childcare collapses.

By building for variance, performance rises. Keep the scope intact, put the basics in place, judge the result and then get on with the work.

Poem

Homecoming

By Isabelle

I will always have brown eyes,
and I will always be autistic.

My voice will always be a little high
for my liking, and I will always be autistic.

I will always be 5’7”,
and I will always be autistic.

I will always be my mother’s daughter,
and I will always be autistic.

I will always love sweet peas,
and I will always be autistic.

No matter what I eat or don’t eat,
I will always be autistic.

No matter what I weigh,
I will always be autistic.

I was born autistic, I will die autistic.
If there is an afterlife, I will be autistic
in it.

The pain I have felt is from chafing
against this truth, from hiding

this truth from those around me,
from being forever an octopus

out of water. I have heard of octopi
dragging themselves across land

to find the sea. No matter how many
years it takes, I will drag my tentacled

self across the hot sand
of other people’s ignorance

and my own. I will find the water.
It will be a salve, a homecoming, a relief.

Article

I aut to have known

By John

My name is John; I am a 41-year-old science teacher, and I recently got diagnosed as autistic. I have a wife and two amazing daughters. I am keen to learn more about autism and engage with other autistic people.

I don't know how unusual my story is, but I think that a late diagnosis is a really interesting experience, and I wanted to share mine.

About 18 months ago, a therapist suggested to me that I may be neurodivergent. No one had ever said anything like this to me my whole life. The funny thing was I knew instantly that it was true. It felt like a switch had gone on. The feeling that I'd been different had always been with me, and in hindsight, I feel stupid that I'd obviously not dug into it more.

I spent the next few months reading up and listening to podcasts in order to learn more.

So much of what I found resonated with me. It led to a period of me rewinding my life and trying to make sense of it viewed through this new lens. So many of the things I have always struggled with, such as decision-making or overthinking, I didn't even realise that other people generally had a different, simpler process. It was an illuminating and confusing process, and I found myself feeling like an observer in my own life.

I went for a diagnosis just to have some certainty and to potentially gain more insight into myself. I didn't meet the NHS threshold for referral through my GP, so I had to go privately. I enjoyed the assessment process as it gave me the chance to do something that was just for me. Unsurprisingly, I received a positive diagnosis.

My next hurdle was accepting myself enough to tell other people. The main thing I was worried about was the irreversibility of sharing. So far, I have managed to tell about a dozen people, mostly family and friends. The response has been positive, but it took me a long time to feel comfortable sharing with my employers.

I feel like there is still a lot of ignorance and misunderstanding around autism, even in education, the sector in which I work. I feel a sense of excitement and of duty to step into this space and do my small part to advocate for autistic people, particularly in education.

After almost two years of knowing and wondering, I feel that I need to 'come out' and share my diagnosis without hesitation. It is nothing to be ashamed of. I am unsure how exactly to do this. I have found myself masking less, and I feel like, although people may not have put it all together, that if someone had been paying attention, they could work out that I was autistic. The fact that no one, to my knowledge, has worked it out speaks volumes about the general levels of awareness that people have.

I am planning to do a PhD in autism, specifically late-diagnosed adults. I realise that at this stage, I don't fully know myself, and that is a priority for me. I want to learn as much as possible in order to help me understand myself but also to increase my capacity to help others.

The teddy bear is an emotional healer

By Nicky

Artwork

She was never the girl you thought she was

Poem

By Elle

She was never the girl you thought
she was,
She was understood by very few.
The stillness and quiet in her room
As she locked herself away.

A prisoner of her own mind at an age
when kids were having water balloon
fights and playing M.A.S.H
She knew she was different,
And wondered why no one ever thought
the same.

If she could go back in time,
She would cry on the flowers that lived
just outside her window.
Because then the flowers would be able
to grow alongside her.
The flowers handle all types of weather,
and she thought that was relatable,
considering in one day,
she could have a thunder storm, hurricane
and a tornado all carry through her mind,
but somehow still stand.

When she played with her Barbies, it
wasn't just play.
She was creating internal family systems
and creating
a safe space for her mind.

The Barbies, the stuffed animals, the Polly
Pockets,
the little trinkets were her dearest friends.
It's not sad,
because it made her happy.

Behind closed doors the mask came off
and her little voice could sing, her little
fingers could
play the piano, her little body could
dance because being perceived was not
a fear in her little room.

"Every child is like this" echoes and
echoes and echoes

When she was dropped off at school
every morning,
her body felt immense weight,
and school was the worst possible place,
her safe space ripped away from her.

She had to be brave every day,
and no one knew that walking down the
halls,
asking the teacher to use the restroom,
figuring out where to eat at lunch
were big, scary moments every single day.

Some days the scary moments were not
conquered,
and she kept everything inside.

There were small moments where she felt
proud,
But neurotypical people around her were
doing these things just fine,
So why was she making such a fuss?

She was never the girl you thought she
was
Her internal battles had to be flattened
down well under the rug.
Only her stuffed animals and her best
friend (Tilly the dog)
were safe spaces for meltdowns.

They didn't ask why, and that comforted
her.
Crying was never about attention,
It was a way to let the weight of it all go.

Outside, crying wasn't acceptable
(so she couldn't release)
Outside, sucking her thumb was deemed
weird in public and at school.
(So she couldn't self soothe)
Outside, being sensitive to everything
around her wasn't possible.
(So she couldn't be herself)

"That happens to everyone" echoes and echoes and echoes
The big feelings, and oh they were so very big,
were only safe to feel when she closed her door to her magic place.
No bullies, no judgement
she could be at peace, while also being at war with herself.

One day she was full of personality, on stage performing,
And within a blink of an eye she realised,
"This world was not meant for you.
You will not survive if you are you.
So stop it
now"
And the mask went on.

She learned it all by myself.
Her internal family systems saved her over and over and over.
(thanks Barbie)
To have woken up every morning,
masking herself as though she belonged,
while burying her true self
turned every struggle into two.
masking made each wound feel deeper, each step harder.
Next month, she turns 30,
And wouldn't you believe it,
She got diagnosed with autism in June
Her story is of survival amongst humankind with brains unlike her own,
who aren't kind,
all the time.

She is understood by few
But that doesn't stop her from working on herself,
and learning how to keep the bedroom door open.

Poem

Language barrier

By Kiera

We speak the same language, though you know more words than I

I study my utmost, but it does not matter how hard I try.

For the hardest language in this world is that of societies,

With all of its rules and expectations, fuelling my anxieties.

I never did learn how to read between the lines.

Why do I have to put on a smile and pretend to be fine?

I'll never be 'easy-going' as you attempt to rip up my routine.

I'll always be terrified in the face of the unseen.

And though I suffer all this fear, somehow I'm 'problematic'

I have a diagnosis, yet they want me to be A-symptomatic.

I'm tired of speaking a language, nobody seems to know

So please, let me teach it to you. Let the awareness grow.

Article

From silence to strength

By Martin

For years, I grappled with self-doubt. It was my constant companion, even in moments of success, a kind word from a friend, a fleeting sense of accomplishment. No achievement seemed enough to silence that inner voice saying: "You don't belong."

It started after my diagnosis in 1995. Autism was not understood as much, and teachers and peers never understood me. The bullying was constant, and through those years, I never wanted to acknowledge I was autistic. The self-doubt was at its peak during middle school and after my back surgery in 2006. I didn't pass many exams and kept failing the SAT tests. But something told me to keep going. After three tries, I finally passed. However, the self-doubt lingered like a thief in the night, with the spiral of silence trying to make the self-doubt unbearable.

Things began to change when I wrote my book about growing up autistic in my middle teens; I received amazing feedback. People came up to me, sharing that not only are they more comfortable sharing their diagnosis with peers and others, but parents also reached out to me, saying they have hope that their child will be okay. That moment was a turning point for me. Writing became my voice to help others fight their self-doubt and accept themselves.

I started sharing my story about being autistic, facing bullying and fighting to believe in myself despite constant doubt. With each act of sharing, the burden of self-doubt lightened just a bit. I connected with others who felt the same way, who also struggled to be seen, heard and understood. The more I spoke out, the more I realised something profound: the very qualities I once hid, my sensitivity, unique perspective and deep empathy, are now my strengths as an advocate. I've spoken at conferences, mentored people and helped others on their journeys. What matters most isn't the accolades or achievements, it's knowing that someone, somewhere, who feels like I once did might hear my story and think, "Maybe I'm not alone."

For those reading this, you are not alone. You have what it takes to fight self-doubt and can be a great leader to others looking for that one person to cheer them on. It's time to step out, with that Beamonesque leap of faith to control the self-doubt. My biggest accomplishment was when I travelled to Dubai for a speaking engagement. After sharing my story near the end, one teen who shares words by singing wanted to say something but couldn't. He was a little nervous, but after telling him it was okay, he sang a beautiful song out of nowhere about how he wishes parents would get closer to their kids and help them. It was such a beautiful moment and unexpected. But that was a big moment after I shared my story to a full house. I was invited back to speak again and excited to see everyone at the right time. Now, I have three or four universities wanting me and conferences to help inspire those to not give up.

As I conclude, I would like to say this: for those who are nervous to accomplish what they want and the goals they set out due to fear of being made fun of or bullied, just know everything will be okay. Even if it may seem that you are not making progress, just know it is one small roadblock on your journey to something much greater. Achieving success does not happen overnight, and these things take time, so don't feel pressured to rush the process. I hope what I say aspires you to inspire change. Remember, it all starts with you. Parents, I know how tough days may be and you probably feel defeated as well, but know that everything will be okay. The reason for the meltdowns and outbursts is us having difficulties communicating how we feel. To us, you are our greatest superheroes, and you mean the absolute world to us.

For those dealing with anxiety, here is a quote: "Anxiety is not just going to ask you to give up once. You are going to get knocked down again, and again, and again, and every time the mud's thicker you're coming out of and every time the voices are telling you 'You can't' gets louder because it doesn't want to see you get to the top beyond its reach, beyond its grasp, beyond its control. So, train your brain by listening to your heart." - Kendall Toole.

As I end this, I want to share a quote that I came up with: "We are like a flower waiting to bloom into something beautiful. When it rains, that essence of life gives us hope we will blossom at the right time."

Why I like soft rock as an autistic man

Article

By Louis

As an autistic man, I've learned that overstimulation can sneak up on me in different ways. Sometimes, it's loud conversations at family gatherings. Other times, it's crowded rooms where too much is happening all at once. It even used to happen often at work. In those moments, my body and mind can feel overwhelmed, and I need to step away to recharge.

One of the best coping tools I've found is listening to soft rock music.

Soft rock feels safe for me. The melodies are gentle, the lyrics are calming and the overall sound doesn't push me further into sensory overload. Instead, it brings me back down. I've built a playlist of artists who really help me regulate: Elton John, Christopher Cross, Peter Cetera (especially his solo songs outside of Chicago), Richard Marx, Air Supply and Dan Fogelberg, to name a few.

When I put on this kind of music, I can feel my anxiety ease and my thoughts slow down. I start to imagine happier things - like planning my next travel adventure, thinking about future speaking engagements or reflecting on the autism advocacy work I share through my YouTube channel. Even after difficult family moments, music has been a way for me to sort through my feelings and remind myself that peace is possible.

Everyone has their own way of coping with stress and overstimulation. For me, soft rock isn't just entertainment - it's a tool that helps me feel grounded, a companion during anxious moments and a reminder of the things I love about life.

Article

Silly scribbles

By Megan

I have been doodling and scribbling on crumpled-up pieces of paper, in pretty patterned notebooks and on my laptop digitally since I was young. I can't say I'm the best drawer in the world. Far from it, in reality. But still, I find enjoyment in putting pencil to paper and seeing what form my scribbles take by the time I decide to call it quits. At one time, I even attempted digital animation after being exposed to it by some of my friends while in secondary school. Perhaps what I enjoy about it is the challenge of keeping the colours between the lines. Alternatively, maybe it's the feeling of freedom because I am free to draw whatever I please with no constraints, unlike in my life, where I often feel as though my wings are clipped.

My diagnosis came through when I was 18 years of age and about to commence the first year of my degree. Though I knew deep down that what I was told rang true, I was utterly stunned to have received this diagnosis and, subsequently, spent years questioning myself. For so long, I had navigated through life, albeit with great difficulty, without this crucial piece of information about myself. How had I gone under the radar for so long? How did I not realise I was autistic sooner? Knowing now that autism is a part of who I am, after being plagued with a deep denial about my diagnosis, I am gradually learning to accept this part of myself. Years later, I am still conjuring up ways to cope within a world that is not designed with people like me in mind, but can only adequately do so now with this knowledge in mind. Much like when I pick up a pen or pencil, knowing I am autistic has provided me with answers to several of my questions and has been freeing in a similar way to when I produce something half-decent on a once blank piece of paper.

I did not stop scribbling when I started university. I would doodle and scribble in my notebooks between classes and even presented a card to one of my tutors that I had hand-drawn myself on one occasion. I did not stop scribbling once I graduated. Scribbling was one of the few things that would bring about a sense of serenity at a time in my life that was less than harmonious, to put it lightly. The same applied for writing, too, and I am currently working on a novel that I aim to one day publish. To this day, I attempt to make a conscious effort to dedicate time to scribbling so that I am able to spread my wings with each pencil stroke and escape from the confines of the real world. Even if only for a short period of time, I enter a world of my own creation that is much brighter and more brilliant - at least in my eyes.

When I was a child, I briefly moved to the Emerald Isle, and while I was there, our family welcomed our very first dog. Her name was Poppy, and that is who I have drawn for this edition of *the Spectrum*.

Artwork

Poppy

By Megan

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Nine-B

By Stephen

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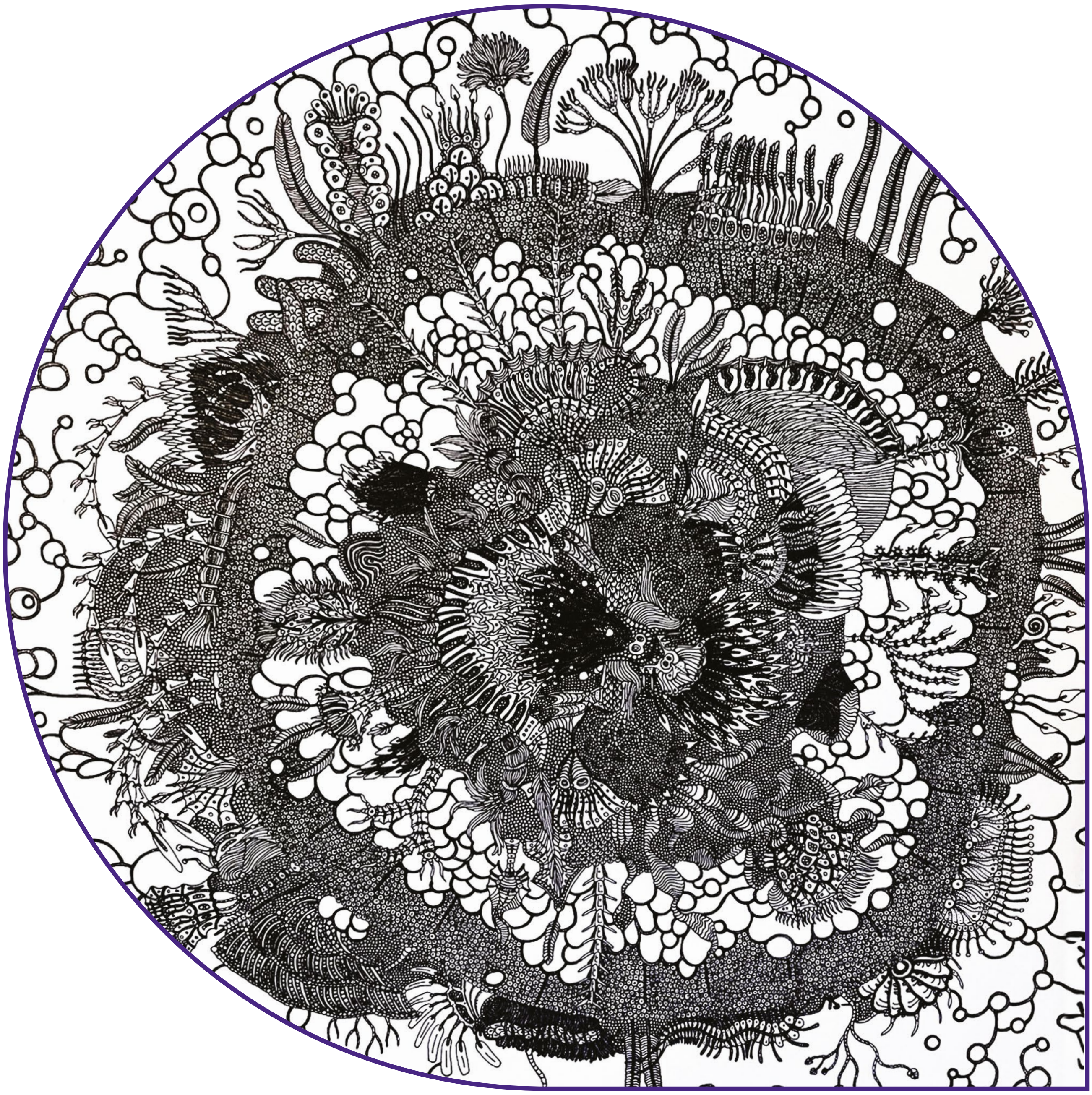
Artwork



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